

# Hikaru no Girl

**By:** chibikaty

Hikaru, unable to bear Akira's disappointment after defeating him at the Kaio game, comes up with a clever plan that will let Akira play Sai again while keeping his identity a secret. Somebody really should stop Hikaru when he's feeling clever.

Status: complete

Published: 2011-12-30

Updated: 2012-09-12

Words: 43729

Chapters: 16

Rated: Fiction K+ - Language: English - Genre: Humor/Romance -  
Characters: Hikaru S., Akira T. - Reviews: 209 - Favs: 333 - Follows: 131

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/7690839/1/Hikaru-no-Girl>

Exported with the assistance of [FicHub.net](https://FicHub.net)

# Hikaru no Girl

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

# Chapter 1

## Hikaru no Girl

---

*Disclaimer: If I owned Hikaru No Go, Sai would have never disappeared.*

---

### Summary:

Hikaru, unable to bear Akira's disappointment after defeating him at the Kaio game, comes up with a clever plan that will explain why he is no longer a Go genius, let Akira play Sai again, and avoid telling the truth.

Somebody really should stop Hikaru when he's feeling clever.

Contains within: cross-dressing, misinformation about mental illnesses, and Sai shipping Akira/Hikaru.

---

### Chapter 1: Joban Leads to Complete and Utter Chaos

If truth be told, Hikaru Shindo was not the type of boy who was prone to a feeling guilty. He was more the type to take the last meatbun, tell Akari that her new hair-style looked the same as the old one, and shove a pillow over his head when Sai started wailing about playing Go. But ever since he'd played against Akira in the school tournament, there was an unfamiliar lead feeling in his stomach.

Hikaru would have liked to convince himself that he felt this way because he had lost. And that the way he'd stared after Akira's back as the other boy walked away had been because he was upset at losing, not because Akira was disappointed in him.

And he might have been able to convince himself of that if he hadn't made the mistake of talking to the other members of Kaio after the tournament.

Curious to know of his connection with Akira, they'd told him more than they'd probably intended. Transferring to a new school, being bullied, studying Go books in every moment of his spare time: all just to face Hikaru Shindo in a lousy middle school tournament. Hikaru himself couldn't understand it at all. But he thought he'd probably never wanted anything in his whole life as much as Akira had wanted to play him-no, Sai. It had been Sai that Akira had wanted to play, and Hikaru had taken that from him. The lead feeling was back again.

After he had resigned, watching Akira look at him with a disappointment that bordered on disgust (the way he'd looked when Hikaru talked about playing Go for money) Hikaru had tried to fix it. He'd told Akira to wait for to become stronger. But that was what only Hikaru wanted, he realized. *Akira* didn't want to wait years for Hikaru to get stronger, become a professional, and challenge him to another Go match. In point of fact, Akira didn't want to play Hikaru at all. He wanted to play Sai.

Hikaru wasn't sure why this bothered him so much. After all, who was Akira but a spoiled little master who took Go far too seriously? But for some reason, Akira's disapproval had been an irritation to Hikaru from almost the moment they met, and realizing this only irritated him more. Stupid, snobby Akira, with no interest in Hikaru except for the Sai he'd glimpsed in their game.

At this point, Hikaru was ready to throw in the towel and just let Akira play Sai again, just so he wouldn't feel so guilty anymore. But given the cold brush-off Akira had given him last time they'd met, he might not even be willing to give Hikaru another chance. Not unless Hikaru could come up with a convincing explanation of why last time had been so terrible, and why this time would be different. It would probably have to be more convincing than "you see, there's this Go-playing ghost which decided to haunt me."

Luckily, good ideas were Hikaru's strong point (in his own opinion, at least.)

Sai waved his fan frantically in front of Hikaru's face. "Hi-kar-ru! Are you listening?"

"No," Hikaru said bluntly. He'd been lying on his bed, trying to think. "It's not as though you ever have anything to say except about Go."

Sai teared up, which was ridiculous on a grown man much less a thousand-year-old ghost. "I'm only trying to help you! How will you reach Akira's level if you don't practice?"

The lead feeling returned to Hikaru's stomach-but this time he recognized the feeling as not guilt but bitterness. "I'm not going to reach Akira's level." He amended, "Not for a very long time. You just wait. But it's not fair to him, if I expect him to wait around for years."

"He's probably not waiting for you to play another game with him anymore," Sai pointed out, a little too aptly.

"No, but I bet he still wants to play you. So we're going to let him. I have this plan..."

---

Stage one of the plan was to obtain Akira's cell phone number. His fortunate encounter with Kaio's captain had helped with that. Hikaru was a little disappointed that he no longer needed Sai to sneak into Akira's room and try to find clues, but the ghost was only relieved. Wimp. It wasn't as though he could be caught or anything. Hikaru himself had been considering sneaking into Akira's room until Sai began asking all these annoying questions, like "Isn't that breaking in and entering?" and "If you're going to walk all the way into his house, why not just leave him a letter?"

Stage two was to send Akira the following message: "To Akira Touya: The person who beat you at Go was not who you think it is. If you want to know the truth, come to the place where you first played

against Hikaru Shindo tomorrow at 12:00. From, a mysterious stranger."

Stage three was to steal Akari's spare gym bag.

Not that she would notice it missing any time soon. What kind of anal-retentive person had three bags packed with a change of clothes just in case she forgot one of them? Hikaru assumed that meant she wouldn't be missing her spare spare bag before the end of the weekend, which would give him enough time.

Time to put his plan into action.

Hikaru strained his neck around, trying to see his back in the mirror. "Sai, how do I look? Do I have the bow on right?"

"It appears to be straight now," the ghost informed him. "But your skirt is shoved up under your underwear."

Growling, Hikaru pulled the offending fabric loose. "I can't believe that girls do this every day. I'm not even going to bother with the make-up."

"Are you sure that is wise?" Sai asked.

"Look, Sai, just because you think it's normal to prance around with your face painted white doesn't mean I'm going to do anything so girly."

Sai refrained from pointing out that Hikaru had no room to talk about being "girly" right now. And that his pale complexion was entirely natural. Instead, he said, "I thought you might disguise yourself some more. Right now you don't look that different."

Hikaru sighed theatrically. "That would be the point, Sai. I look exactly like Hikaru Shindo, so that explains why Akira mistook me for him when I first played Go with him. But, I am clearly a girl, and therefore cannot be Hikaru Shindo. I'm a similar looking yet different

obscenely talented Go player. And then Akira can play you and you can resoundingly beat him again and we'll all be happy."

The idea of pretending to be someone else had occurred to Hikaru right away-the idea of pretending to be a girl, he had been less enthusiastic about. Hikaru had initially wanted to go as his identical twin brother, but had to admit that if even Sai thought it was a stupid idea then no one would believe it. (And what did he mean by that, Sai wondered?)

Then Hikaru had considered a fake beard, a pair of thick-rimmed glasses, and platform shoes, but had been disappointed by the realization that these tools would actually cost money. On the other hand, Akari accidentally leaving her gym bag at his house was free. Sai couldn't help thinking that only Hikaru would cross-dress because it was cheap.

Hikaru attempted to hike his leg up on the sink so he could look at it in the mirror. "Come on, Sai, this mirror is too small for me to really see myself. Do I look like a real girl or not? I'm supposed to meet Akira in an hour."

Sai gave Hikaru a close look. Dressed in skirt and blazer, his hair smoothed down and the bleached fringe tucked up under a baseball cap, Hikaru did look like a girl. A tomboyish, flat-chested girl, but even so if Sai had been meeting him for the first time he wouldn't have thought twice about the young teen's gender.

*If* he had been meeting him for the first time; that was the critical point. "You look like Hikaru."

Hikaru rolled his eyes. "Yes, I know, but do I look like a boy in a skirt? Because that would be mortifying."

"No," Sai said honestly. "You make a presentable young lady."

"Great, because I don't have any other ideas and I need to catch the train!"

A thought occurred to Sai. "Hikaru, your voice. You don't sound like a girl!"

Hikaru paused for a second, then said in a high falsetto, "Oh, dear, I'm late for my train!"

Sai winced. "Perhaps it would be better if you simply didn't talk at all."

---

Akira didn't know what he was doing at the Go salon. That message on his cell phone had been ridiculous, but then every single thing that had happened to him after meeting Hikaru Shindo had been ridiculous. Starting with the part where he had been crushed by a boy who held his stones like a beginner and spoke mockingly of Go—that still stung. After the third game he'd worked so hard for turned into a disaster, he'd been prepared to forget about Hikaru Shindo entirely.

Except, not as prepared as he thought he was, because one transparently anonymous text message later, here he was.

His head jerked up at the clang of the door opening, as it had been for the last half an hour.

Except this time, his head stayed up, and his eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets.

Standing in the doorway, wearing a brown long-sleeved shirt with a white collar, gold buttons, a big black bow, black knee socks, and a pleated skirt was... Hikaru Shindo. Akira blinked, bulged, and looked again. Yes, that was definitely the Haze Middle School girl's uniform, and that was Hikaru's face peeking out above it, under a completely-out-of-place baseball cap.

Hikaru turned his back to Akira to pay Ms. Ichikawa. Yes, Akira could see that was definitely not some sort of effeminate boy's shirt—that was definitely a school girl's skirt he was wearing. Ms. Ichikawa

didn't seem to notice anything. Akira wondered if he could be hallucinating.

Hikaru turned around, eyes scanning the room. His gaze lit on Akira, and he beamed and walked over.

Leaning over the table, in a faint breathy whisper, he said, "Hi."

"Hi," Akira replied. His brain screamed, "Why are you wearing a school girl's uniform?"

Hikaru held out his cellphone. Numbly, Akira took it, and read: "I am Hikaru's twin sister. I am sorry that you confused me with my brother, but I am the one you played a match against here, not him. We look a lot alike, it is an easy mistake to make. Plus I sometimes steal his clothes. Do you want a rematch?"

Akira's brain wanted to know, "What's going on? Do you honestly expect me to believe any of this? Have you lost your mind?" His mouth said, "Yes."

Hikaru took white, Akira black. Stones clacked against the board. (Akira couldn't help noticing that Hikaru had gotten much better at holding the stones, nor did he make so many odd pauses.) The skillful elegance in the Fuseki told Akira that this was the original Hikaru he was facing, the one who made him tremble with each move of the game.

Yet even while playing Go, Akira's thoughts wouldn't stop. True, as far as Go games went, he would swear that he was playing a completely different person. But his eyes told him that this was the same Hikaru Shindo. Yes, that was definitely the same bright mischievous face peeking over a white schoolgirl's uniform collar. It was the way Hikaru placed the Go stones that finally convinced him—still a little clumsy, but an improvement over last time. Just as Hikaru had made the stones clack a little sharper with every game he had played since their first one. Yes, even with that disgraceful Kaio game, Hikaru's hand motions had improved even if his strategies

had deteriorated. But why? Why had he pretended to stop knowing how to play Go? Why was he pretending to be someone else? Why did he still move the stones as if he was a beginner when he played like a professional, albeit one from a hundred years ago? Why, oh why, was he wearing a school girl's uniform?

Akira snuck another look at the girl who was actually Hikaru. She had already made her move but was watching the board with a look he'd describe as curiosity. No, not she, that was a he. In a school girl's uniform.

"You were about five minutes late. Did you miss your train?" he asked politely.

She grunted, keeping her face down. She hadn't spoken a word since they started playing. Now that didn't seem like Hikaru at all. Perhaps he was wrong, and this was a one-in-a-billion look alike with a very similar style of Go?

Bored at the pause in the game, his opponent tipped his chair backwards, then flailed arms wildly as he almost fell over. No, that was definitely Hikaru. In a school girl's uniform. Yes, Akira had thought that before, but there was something about the idea of Hikaru Shindo in a school girl's uniform that had his brain stuck on "repeat."

He played the worst Go game in his entire life. Even when he'd been sick with a 104°F fever and his father had brought a Go board to the hospital, he has still made a better showing than this. When he realized he had no recourse but to resign, he felt disgraced. His father had taught him not to be ashamed of a lost game, but this was not a game he could be proud of.

Hikaru held up the cell phone again. "Rematch?" it read. So his opponent had noticed how poorly he had played. Well, even if Hikaru had been a beginner instead of a Go genius, he still would have noticed that the game has lasted under ten minutes.

"Can we play again a different day?" Akira pleaded. A part of him did still want this rematch, oh yes. But he knew he wouldn't play any better if he began another game right now.

Hikaru frowned, clearly not enthused. But he nodded his head and stood up, mumbling, "Fine."

He was about to leave. "Wait," Akira called, stumbling to his feet. "When do we play again?"

Hikaru waved his cell phone.

"Give me your number?"

Hikaru started to hand over his cell phone, and then jerked away. He did not seem to want to part with any revealing information. He also had a dim grasp of technology; he didn't seem to realize that Akira already had Hikaru's number because of the message telling him to meet here. Akira had only asked because he wanted to see if Hikaru's phone had his name on it.

"What is your name?" he asked, certain he already knew but curious as to the response.

Hikaru looked as froze. It had clearly never dawned on him that he could be asked this question. In the same low voice, he murmured, "Sai," then turned and fled.

---

Hikaru's plan had gone absolutely brilliantly, in his own opinion. He had straightened out his story with Akira. No one had so much as given him a second glance on the train. His brilliant disguise was impenetrable. He probably should have thought of an alias in advance instead of blurting out the first thing that came to mind, but in fact it was oddly fitting for Akira to know his Go opponent as "Sai." The only downside is that Akira had happened to be sick today. Hikaru could tell by how flushed his face had been. He must have come despite having a fever-typical Akira, not about to give up a Go

game for anything. Hikaru was fairly neutral about going through this charade a second time, but he hadn't gone to all this trouble for an unsatisfactory result.

After this, he wouldn't see Akira again. Well, not until he came back as a Go professional and force Akira to acknowledge his own skills!

That thought lightened him considerably. Cheerfully, he said, "Sai, at least you got to play Go today, huh?"

"It wasn't much of a game," the ghost grumbled. "I could have been playing against myself."

"Don't be so selfish! Akira dragged himself out here even though he was sick. And you'll get a rematch. The one who should be angry is me-I didn't ask to waste my Saturday afternoon doing this!"

---

As far as Hikaru was concerned, that was the end of that conversation. But little did he know, the reason why Sai didn't pester him on the train ride home or question him about modern foods over dinner was because the ghost was deep in thought.

As he mulled over what Hikaru had said, Sai was forced to admit that the boy was right-he gained absolutely nothing by indulging Sai with Go games. Sai himself might think that anything to do with Go was a pleasure, but Hikaru had demonstrated on numerous occasions that he did not feel the same way. Even Sai's reluctant help with his history homework did not seem to outweigh the sheer amount of time Hikaru had put into indulging Sai's whims.

Sai had tried to help Hikaru by tutoring him in Go, but Hikaru's enthusiasm for that went up and down faster than one of those odd metal carts that rode across the sky on television. Besides, playing Go with Hikaru was as much doing himself a favor as the other way around.

In that case, if Sai wasn't doing anything else to help Hikaru, then that really made him just a parasite of a ghost haunting an unfortunate person.

With Honinbo Shusaku, it had been easy. Little Torajirou liked to win. He liked the fame and prestige and money that came with being a Go champion. And since Sai liked to play Go and was good at winning, so that worked out nicely. But Hikaru didn't seem to like Sai playing his games for him at all. So how was Sai supposed to pay his rent for the space he was taking up in Hikaru's life?

Sai tried to think about what Hikaru did like. He liked food, he liked soccer, and he liked Sai helping him in history class. He liked winning Go games, but only when he did it himself. Oh, and he also liked it when Akira paid attention to him. These days, Akira seemed to be practically all Hikaru thought about.

Perhaps there was a way Sai could help Hikaru with that?

---

Akira came to his next game with his mind clear and free of earthly emotions. When he received the awaited-for text from Hikaru, he did not puzzle over what was going on with the strange boy and he did not even wonder if he would be wearing the school girl's uniform again for more than five seconds. Instead, he played over his first two games with Hikaru a few times, practiced some Go puzzles, and left early for the same Go salon where the message had told him to meet for their next match.

His transformation came about for a simple reason. He had turned to his father with his problem. The conversation had gone something like this:

"Father, if you're in the middle of a Go game and your opponent is doing something very bizarre and distracting, what is the acceptable response?"

Koyo Touya frowned severely. "No response in necessary. You cannot allow yourself to be distracted."

"What if you're... concerned... about your opponent's well-being?" (About his sanity, he added mentally.)

"If your opponent is in any distress, it is their business to decide whether to continue. You need only to focus on the Go board in front of you. To do anything else is disrespectful to your opponent."

Father was right, Akira decided. He had played a disgraceful game last time. Just because Hikaru himself often played disgraceful games and declined to take Go seriously was no excuse. This time, Akira would play to win, and Hikaru could come in a nurse's outfit if that was what struck his fancy. Or a maid's uniform. Or maybe cat ears.

But no, he was still a school girl.

Hikaru took his seat in silence, muttering the cursory phrase "Onegaishimasu" under his breath. Without asking he took the weaker side white again, which was a tad patronizing.

But his arrogance was justified, Akira couldn't deny that. This time, with his fully mind on the game, Akira could recognize the brilliance of the former Hikaru in every move. The only person he knew who played like this was his father-but where Touya Meijin's style was as unyielding as a mountain, this player was like the wind, flowing through his defenses and taking over so smoothly that it was several moves before he realized that he had fallen into a trap. It took all his concentration just to play on his opponent's level.

Hikaru leaned over a little and began to pull on one of his knee-socks, which had slipped down. Akira took a deep breath and reminded himself about concentration.

He turned back to the board. But he began to notice something odd. They had fallen into *joseki*, which was unusual for a player of Hikaru

(the original Hikaru)'s brilliance. A closer look and he concluded this was to distract him from the odd structure at *tengen*, where a critical stone of his was in *atari* . Not about to let his opponent control his *fuseki* so easily, Akira knew he had to defend even if it left him with an *aji* . But three moves later, he knew his pride had left him in *tsumego* . He was almost about to resign, when to his astonishment Hikaru completely ignore the *sente* and drops his next stone in a *dame* . But this move was less random than it seemed: Hikaru had divided the *fuseki* completely evenly between them, down to the last stone, and played a move that invited him into the *tengen* that belonged to Hikaru. It was a true demonstration of *tesuji* to have forced this standoff, but why play a move that sacrificed his own victory? A move that seemed to invite them to build territory together to mutual benefit instead of competing this stones? An offer of friendship-no, of mutual commitment on the board.

Was Hikaru flirting with him? Using GO ?

Akira's arm jerked and he overturned the Go cup all over the table.

---

"I can't believe it. Another ruined game!" Hikaru moaned. "I can't believe that after all his blah-blah about proper Go etiquette, Akira was so clumsy. I suppose even Mr. Perfect makes mistakes."

"I think it went well. You have another game with him next weekend," Sai said. It had not escaped his notice that Hikaru had scheduled another game, instead of insisting on a rematch on the spot so he could cut ties with Akira that day. Clearly the ghost was on the right track. "I don't think Akira would mind playing you on a regular basis either."

Hikaru's steps faltered slightly. "It's not me he wants to play. It's you."

Sai said, "But he doesn't know it's not you?"

In disgust, Hikaru said, "You don't understand anything, Sai."

Sai supposed he didn't. He was going to have to try harder.

---

To play disgracefully in one game was, perhaps, forgivable. To do it twice was an embarrassment to everything Akira's father had ever taught him. At least the second time, he had the excuse that his opponent had also been taking Go equally frivolously.

Yet no sooner had he thought that than doubt arose. In both their recent games, Hikaru had played magnificently, no shadow of his klutzy self during the Kaio tournament. As for the second game-maybe Akira had been reading too much into his moves. Maybe the shape on the board was a coincidence. Hikaru certainly hadn't behaved as if there was any kind of message on the Go board. He'd been his usual abrasive, energetic self, fidgeting and playing each stone with an absence of calm. Except for the fact that Hikaru hadn't spoken a word.

Oh, and the school girl's uniform.

Akira stared down at the game he'd been attempting to replay. He'd completely lost his place. And he was no sooner to figuring out the meaning behind Hikaru's strange stratagems than before. Also, he couldn't help noticing that despite the skilled player making some rather odd moves towards the end, Akira was still losing by a significant margin. He'd hoped he had improved-but the wall between them was as high as ever.

Clearly, Akira had no choice but to unravel the mystery of Hikaru Shindo. For the sake of his Go, obviously.

---

Hikaru spent a good portion of the next week studying Go. He pressured Tetsuo and Yuki endlessly to play with him, stayed up late practicing with Sai, and even spent some money on a book about studying to be a professional. Having watched Akira and Sai play, he was more frustrated than ever with his own weakness.

Alas, the games with Akira had not been enough to satisfy Sai's desire to play. Hikaru thought about asking if playing him wasn't good enough, but he really didn't want to know the answer to that. He had eventually succumbed to pressure and visited an unfamiliar Go salon. After checking carefully to make sure no one he knew, especially Akira was around before he started playing. Honestly, it was almost less nerve-wracking to play for Sai as a girl.

He barely made it in home in time for dinner, something he knew wouldn't make his mother happy. He breezed past her on the stairs before she could catch him.

He found Akari waiting for him on his bed, holding up her gym bag. "Hikaru, why does my uniform look like it's been worn?"

Hikaru cursed his mother for letting Akari into his room without asking. He cursed himself for not thinking of a better hiding place for the bag than under his bed. He cursed Akari for being a girl and for not knowing how to mind her own business. But most of all, he cursed the day he'd ever met Akira Touya.

---

*To be continued.*

# Chapter 2

## Hikaru no Girl

---

### Chapter 2: Being a Genius is not the Same as Being Smart

---

Akira Touya knew where Hikaru lived. He had visited his school and found out his address back when he was trying to track the elusive boy down for a Go game. He had also asked around Haze Middle School and found out what time he normally came home, before he realized that following Hikaru home might be a tad stalker-ish, even if it was for Go.

He also had Hikaru's phone number, because the other boy had kept sending him messages. It occurred to him that he might as well confirm that it was Hikaru's cell phone.

It had been fairly easy to confirm that Hikaru didn't have a sister. Not that Akira had expected anything else, really. But Hikaru's neighbors had confirmed that only one boy lived next door. Just to be sure, he'd also tracked down some hospital records to confirm that Hikaru did not have a twin. He'd also made sure that yes, the baby had been a boy. (Akira had put his "good-boy" looks to serious use to obtain that. He'd always known that adults were easily persuaded when he acted sincere, but this was the first time he'd put this to such shameless use.)

But having confirmed what Hikaru was not (not more than one person and not female) Akira was still at a loss to understand what he was. He had first wondered if Hikaru's parents were some sort of evil anti-Go fanatics oppressing their son's talent and forcing him to drastic measures. But questions around Hikaru's school had only revealed that Hikaru's grandfather had been a Go player and his parents had offered no protest to his joining the Go club. Then could

Hikaru be involved in some sort of illegal Go gambling? Akira winced at the way Ogata had laughed at him when he'd brought up criminal Go gambling. Besides, according to the bank manager who was so willing to help the nice polite Hikaru Shindo who was so worried about his parents, the Shindos had no financial problems. Akira didn't think Hikaru was the type of boy to become a criminal without a good reason. Then, he'd never known that he himself was so good at lying.

Long story short, when next weekend rolled around Akira was no closer to unraveling the mystery of Hikaru Shindo.

---

Hikaru's absolutely brilliant and completely fail-safe plan had hit an unexpected snag: Akari had noticed her bag was missing. This was a puzzle to Hikaru, who had once gone two weeks without noticing that he'd left his backpack at Akari's house. (He'd thought his back seemed much lighter than usual as he walked to school, and optimistically concluded that he must be putting on muscle with puberty.) Even more to Hikaru's surprise, Akari had actually remembered where she'd left her bag last, had barged into his room without permission to look for it (how dare his traitorous mother let her in?) and, worst of all, noticed with her evil girl senses that her uniform had been worn. And now she had him at her mercy.

Akari cooed, "You know, Hikaru, growing up together as only children, it's almost like we're siblings. But do you know what?"

"What?" Hikaru asked, wincing as the hairbrush snagged on a tangle in his hair.

"I actually always wanted a sister!" Akari squealed as she held up some black hair extensions. "Oh, my, this is going to look lovely."

"Whatever you did to my bangs had better wash out," Hikaru warned her.

"It will," Akari said dismissively. "Those types of highlights don't suit a girl, Hikaru. Now hold still, I'm almost done with your hair."

Akari had taken Hikaru's uniform theft in stride, in fact with alarming alacrity. She had insisted on her uniform back, of course. Then she had insisted on providing replacement clothing. And then she hadn't let Hikaru get any further than explaining he was meeting a boy who thought he was a girl before she insisted on doing his hair and make-up.

Eyeing the clock, Hikaru said, "Akari, I'm going to be late."

"Just let me fasten this-done! Aw, come over here in front of the mirror and take a look."

Of course, Akari had a full-length mirror in her room, being a girl. Hikaru avoided looking himself in the eye, or the eye shadow. She had better be telling the truth about her parents not being home for another two hours.

Akari's eyes misted over as she looked at him. "Hikaru, you look like a princess!"

"You're not going to mention this to anyone, are you?" he asked.

"Of course not. But there is one favor you could do me."

"What?" Hikaru asked warily.

"When we're alone, do you think you might call me... Onee-san?"

Hikaru got the hell out of there.

---

Today, Akira had placed his Go cup carefully out of range of where his arm might knock it over. This saved him from another accident, although did not protect his forehead from damage when it collided with the table after Hikaru Shindo walked in the door.

Hikaru was wearing a scarlet shirt with a white fleece vest, and a black leather skirt with a silver-studded belt. Long black hair draped around his neck in silky ringlets, reflecting the same shimmer as his dark eyes, and fastened with a butterfly pin. Of his bleached bangs, there was no trace. His skin seemed smoother than usual, his lips redder. Was that lipstick?

Hikaru slid into the seat in front of Akira. "You're late," Akira managed.

Hikaru shoved a notebook at him. Akira took a look and read. "My name is Sai Shindo. I was separated at birth from my twin brother because my family owed a huge debt to the wealthy Fujisaki family who rule Japan from the shadows. Now I live together with my big sister Akari as her little sister and we are best friends."

Akira shot Hikaru a puzzled look. Hikaru avoided his gaze as he reached for the bowl with white stones.

The writing was not Hikaru's handwriting. Akira knew that because he'd rooted through Hikaru's backpack once. Looking for clues, that was all.

If Hikaru was completely delusional, that might explain a great deal. Or perhaps he simply enjoyed toying with Akira. Distracting him from Go. With barely an "Onegaishimasu," Akira angrily attacked the board.

---

Half an hour later, Akira knew that he had played his best: and still lost. Miserably. He stared at the board. Why couldn't he seem to grasp this opponent's playing style? It was like dueling with air. And he understood the mind behind that skill even less.

Hikaru Shindo stood up abruptly and walked out. Akira didn't even have time to ask him if they would play again next week. Sometimes he felt like he'd spent the entirety of their acquaintance chasing after Hikaru.

---

"Gah, I can't believe Akari put me through this!" Hikaru grumbled as he scrubbed off some make-up, hunched over in the corner of the restroom in case someone else walked in. He preferred ducking into the men's restroom when no one was looking to change, rather than going home and risking the neighbors seeing him.

"Are we playing again next week?" Sai inquired.

"I don't know. I'm not sure if Akira will be satisfied until he beats you- but he's not anywhere near your level right now, is he? And I think I should quit before this gets out of hand."

Sai's face twisted in disappointment. Hikaru supposed it was at the loss of a regular Go game. The ghost asked, "Do you think Akira frequents that particular Go salon often? I think we should go back. You could stand to practice a few games on your own."

"And we don't want to run into Akira, right. Well, if we go back now he'll have just left. I wouldn't risk going where he might be otherwise."

Hikaru turned to leave, wondering why Sai looked frustrated. Usually the ghost was happy to do anything that remotely related to Go.

---

Except Akira hadn't left. He was still there, still in front of the same dumb board. He seemed to be replaying his game with Sai-the very first one.

Hikaru paused outside the window, then turned to go.

"Ask him for a game!" Sai hissed.

"What, you want to play him again? Didn't crushing his ego once today satisfy you?"

"Not for me! For you!"

Hikaru shook his head. "He has no interest in playing me, remember? Let's go home."

---

It was sheer coincidence that Akira happened to look out the window at that moment. Happened to see who was walking past.

It was Hikaru. Wearing his same dumb orange jacket that he always used to wear before he developed an interest in cross-dressing. What had brought him back again?

Before he even had time to think, Akira had leapt to his feet and was running for the door, ignoring Ms. Ichikawa's surprised look.

He'd forced himself in front of Hikaru before he realized he didn't know what to say. "Hello," he said breathlessly.

"Hello."

What would he do if Akira called his bluff? Asked why he was lying and pretending? Would he tell the truth or just disappear forever?

"Your sister is very good at Go. We had a great game today."

"I became an insei. I want to take the next professional exam," Hikaru said, a note of challenge in his voice.

Does he really think Akira would say he can't do it? When after crushing Akira himself just half an hour ago? "You don't need any training for that."

Hikaru jerked. "Not Sai. Me."

Stop pretending already, Akira wanted to scream. I know who you are, I know how you're capable of playing, I know you don't need any practice to become a professional, what I don't know is what is the point of this charade!

Hikaru is a mystery, and Akira needs to understand. Father once told him it is possible to get feeling of a person through their Go. "Do you want to play a game?"

Hikaru didn't ask, "What, right this very second?" which was how people usually reacted when Akira got in the mood to drop everything and play Go. Instead, he said, "With me? Not Sai?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I can spare you a few minutes." Hikaru did not turn away fast enough to hide his grin.

---

As he half-expected, Akira found himself playing the Hikaru from the Kaio game, not Sai. And yet now that he had already played "Sai" it wasn't such a disappointment to face someone else, so he treated Hikaru as he would any weaker opponent, and set about systematically crushing him.

It was over in about five minutes, and Hikaru bit his lower lip as he muttered, "I resign."

Akira searched Hikaru's face for any trace of a joke, but found nothing. Hikaru looked as genuinely disappointed as anyone would after losing. His attention hadn't wandered during their game, nor had he moved too quickly-he'd stared at the board with great concentration, and winced every time Akira captured a stone. In other words, he'd taken their game completely seriously and played with his whole heart.

Not just the skill of the game had been different, but the style as well. "Sai" played an old-fashioned game, but also a complex strategy that turned your own moves against you. Hikaru was prone to frontal attacks and eclectic moves.

After seeing it with his own eyes, Akira couldn't doubt that he was honestly playing a different person from the one he'd challenged

earlier this afternoon. Or that both his opponents had played honorably and with all their skill. His father was right: you could understand people through Go.

Akira said, "Makemashita." Then, clearing the board, he said, "That was a good game. Would you like to go over it, so we can discuss how it could have gone differently?"

He spent the next half an hour trying to teach Hikaru without looking too much like he's teaching him, as he suspected that would hurt Hikaru's pride.

When he was done, Akira didn't go home. He went straight to the library, and asked for every book they had on Multiple Personality Disorder.

---

Outside the salon: "I think that went well. He doesn't suspect a thing," Hikaru told Sai.

---

"... And then he asked if I wanted to play him again another day! That must mean he enjoyed the game, right?" Hikaru asked. There was a distinct spring in his step as he walked towards the train station.

"That's good. It's good that he doesn't only like you in Akari's clothes," Sai mumbled. "Hikaru, do you think Akira might want to walk by the river with you?"

"What river?" Hikaru asked. They're in the middle of Tokyo, for crying out loud.

"I was something people did to become closer, in my time."

"For Go-players?" Hikaru asked disinterestedly.

"Not only them," Sai said delicately. "In this era you would-go see a play?"

"Still a hundred years too early, Sai. I think you mean see a movie."

"Yes. That. Hikaru, I very much want to walk by one of these movies. Why don't we see if Akira wants to movie after next time we play?"

"Movie isn't a verb, Sai." Hikaru was suspicious. Since when had Sai ever cared about anything besides Go? Was he up to something?

"Ooo, Hikaru! I see Touya Meijin in a shiny box!" Sai declared, pointed at a television in a store window. "Please kindly tell him that if he will come out of the box, we can play Go!"

Sai, plotting something? Nah.

# Chapter 3

## Hikaru no Girl

---

### Chapter 3: Why Sente Is Not Always a Good Move

---

When Akira asked about split personalities, it is quite possible that the librarian did not completely understand what he was looking for, because instead of giving him a textbook about mental illnesses, she handed him a stack of manga books.

A few hours later, all he had learned about split personalities was that one of them usually had magical powers. This same personality was typically deranged and evil, or at the very least prone to violence. The closest Akira could find to a split personality with magical game-playing skills was the ghost of an Egyptian pharaoh with an eye on his forehead.

Akira was nothing if not persistent. He did an online search. Then he went back to the library again.

---

"Akari, please. I'm begging you. We're friends, aren't we?"

"Fine. I suppose a pair of women's jeans will do, this time," Akari said sulkily, putting away the frilly white dress. "I hope you'll at least hold still long enough for me to do your hair tomorrow. I brought a new wig in Harujuku."

Hikaru hinted, "Actually, I was thinking about calling all this off. Akira seems to be satisfied with the last game and all that."

"But-Hikaru, we were going to play tomorrow!" Sai's eyes welled up, as they always did when he was denied a chance at Go.

Akari held up a hairpin. "I can't force you to do anything," she said, in a meek voice that resembled the sweet Akari that Hikaru had known since kindergarten, and that he'd come to distrust over the last week. "But you're going to meet this boyfriend of yours as yourself on Sunday, aren't you? How will you explain when he asks why your 'sister' didn't show up?"

This was a very good point, and one that forced Hikaru to realize what a trap he'd gotten himself into. "Why can't I play Go invisibly?" he mumbled.

Akari said, "If that was what you wanted, why didn't you just play online?"

---

Hikaru couldn't believe how stupid he was. He would never admit this, until his dying day. But over and over again, he couldn't help thinking that if he'd known about Net Go, then this would have been an absolutely great way to play Akira while pretending to be another person. A great way that wouldn't have involved cross-dressing or being blackmailed by Akari for the rest of his life.

In fact, Hikaru was almost willing to forgive Akari for everything in exchange for her letting him in on the secret of playing Go on the internet. Plus, her makeovers were probably helping him not get caught as a boy, even if she did seem to be enjoying the whole thing a little too much. He was also grateful to Yuki's sister for letting him play Go in the café for free. Akari had been trying to persuade her family to buy a computer for years, but until then Hikaru had no choice but to use the internet café.

Ironically enough, Hikaru accidentally ran into Akira online. He didn't recognize the screen name but he certainly recognized the player once he began. Since Hikaru typed in his name as "Sai" Akira must have guessed who he was from the beginning. Technically, there was no need for them to meet in person anymore-but Hikaru still wanted to play Akira as himself. And they'd fallen into a pattern, of

meeting Akira as "Sai" on Saturday and "Hikaru" on Sunday. Meanwhile, there are other people for Sai to play on the internet.

Net Go certainly made Sai happy, Hikaru thought fondly. Hikaru himself would resent the use of his time, but then he learned a lot about Go from watching Sai. Between tutoring from Sai and Akira, all the other insei were barely hiding their jealousy at his progress. Of course, lessons with Akira were as secret as Sai's existence, if only because Waya would kill him.

Hikaru did not use the internet for anything except playing Go, and he was not the most observant person that ever lived. That was why he had no idea how famous Sai was becoming.

---

Akira enjoyed playing Hikaru and Sai every weekend. He'd started thinking of them as separate people, because the books tell him that in a sense they are. Sai seemed to have a new outfit every day. Hikaru's taste for orange had become oddly endearing, although there really was no excuse for why he should care what Hikaru wears, and he is going to stop thinking about that right now.

Once Akira stopped forcing Sai to crush him every game, they began to play teaching games together, and Akira could feel himself improving. Even his father commented on it, and said that Akira became a pro just in time, as if he'd waited any longer he might have humiliated his first opponents.

Akira couldn't honestly say it was as useful to play the other Hikaru. But it was fun, playing him. Not as challenging, not as intense-but Hikaru grabbed his attention, made insane moves, and even while winning Akira couldn't say he was bored.

When playing Hikaru, Akira thinks, "Someday, this player could be great." Which is ridiculous, because Hikaru doesn't need to take time to learn Go, not when he already has so much skill locked up in the bleached blond head of his. Having him turn out to be *two* Go geniuses would be silly, not to mention grossly unfair.

The only thing nagging at the back of Akira's mind was what he read about DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder) leading to destroyed lives, broken relationships, and suicide. Everything he had read seemed to indicate that split personalities either resolved themselves or grew steadily worse. They were actually healthier in manga books than in real life, which was saying something. Akira had no medical background and he didn't know what to do. But as Hikaru's friend, he couldn't help thinking that he ought to do *something* .

It was because he was trying to help Hikaru that Akira found out about the mystery player known as the Saint of Net Go, and inadvertently unleashed Armageddon on the Go world.

---

He started out by researching mental illnesses and Go. He found nothing about Go geniuses, but did find that physically handicapped people could play Go online. And somehow, on his first time entering Net Go, he found a player named Sai.

One game was all it took for Akira to realize who this player was. And he'd discovered a parallel: Hikaru played all his in-person games as himself, and all his games in disguise or online as Sai. Conclusion: he was unable to reveal his second personality in public. Why, Akira could only speculate. Maybe he could only play Go as Sai when he cross-dressed? That might explain why he was attempting to become a Go professional with his weaker set of skills.

Akira thought that lack of Sai was a great loss to the Go world. And he thought that Hikaru would be happier if he sailed through the pro test with Sai's skills, because wouldn't winning games make him happy? All he wanted was to see if there was some small way he might be able to help.

Akira's father had been invited to dinner at Honinbo Kuwabara's house. He hadn't been able to attend, but Akira had asked to go in his place. He'd had a question he wanted to ask.

He hadn't expected the dinner to be entirely made of title holders and those at a similar level. And he'd meant to be *quiet* when he asked Kuwabara-sensei if there was any way that someone could compete in a tournament without showing his name or face.

Kurata, who'd overheard, snorted and said, "Don't be ridiculous."

Akira began to protest, "But suppose someone was injured. In the hospital-"

"If you are too injured to continue, you have no choice but to withdraw from a match," Ogata said, leaning over the table.

"Suppose someone had a permanent condition, and could never leave the hospital. Surely something could be done?"

"It's not in the rules," Morishita said thoughtfully. "Naturally, I would feel great sympathy for such a person. But could talented Go ever develop in isolation, without constantly playing strong opponents? Surely such a person couldn't exist."

Akira realized that the rest of the table had fallen silent. All of his father's colleagues and rivals were looking at him. Squirming, he said, "Suppose that person played Net Go?"

An outburst of laughter shook the table.

"Net Go? They're all a bunch of amateurs!" Kuwabara explained, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. "Most couldn't even hold up their heads in a professional tournament."

"That's not true," Akira snapped.

Kuwabara raised a majestic eyebrow.

Wishing he'd never started this conversation, Akira said, "I know of one player on the internet who's easily professional level."

"Did you lose to him?" someone Akira barely recognized asked mockingly. "That alone hardly makes him a professional."

"He's stronger than me, but he's more than that," Akira insisted. "I would put him about at my father's level."

Everyone at the table started laughing again. Akira's ears burned.

"Well, care to put your money on the table and introduce us to this player?" Kurata suggested. "We all knew this evening would end in a game, might as well play this mystery man. I've never tried Net Go before, could be interesting."

"He might not be online," Akira protested. But Ogata had already brought over his laptop.

Akira sighed inwardly, knowing that all of these senior professionals would mock him over this for some time to come, and that there was no way Sai would be online. It was late and Hikaru would be at home, not playing Net Go.

Kuwabara, current holder of the Honinbo title, would probably bring this up as a cute story next time he talked to Akira's father. Akira was already resigned to the humiliation.

The time was Tuesday at 7:30, Japanese time.

---

Mitani's sister leaned over Hikaru's shoulder. "Are you sure it's alright for you to stay so late?"

Hikaru said, "My parents are out for the evening. They won't even notice."

She sighed. "I hope it's not a bother for you that I'm on the late shift tonight."

"Nah, it's nothing. I have my parents' permission." Even Hikaru was socially perceptive enough to realize that he had no right to expect Mitani's sister to arrange her schedule around him. If she swapped shifts with a sick friend, he would have to accommodate. But Hikaru had no intention of listening to Sai whine all week about missing his Go games, so Hikaru had faked a bout of sickness at home and snuck out the window. He just hoped no one tried to check on him. Luckily, Hikaru thought he was getting pretty good at the art of deception.

Around such small coincidences, our lives turn.

A name popped up. Ogata2339 was challenging him to a game. Hikaru accepted.

---

Kurata was the first to take the computer and play. When he lost, the rest began to rib him gently about it.

It wasn't until Kuwabara lost that the mood turned deadly serious.

---

Hikaru lifted his arms backwards and stretched. "Whoa, that guy just kept coming back for more!"

Sai said, "That was a different person playing each time. Each player's style was unmistakable, as you should be able to tell, Hikaru."

"So he kept calling friends over to try and beat you?" Hikaru was unimpressed. This sounded rather unsporting.

"Those were some wonderful games, Hikaru. I must take the rest of the evening to think about them."

Hikaru perked up. "Then we still have an hour left with the computer. I think I'll watch some anime."

Sai asked eagerly, "Can we see that nice show with the ghost who is King of Games?"

Hikaru rolled his eyes. These days, Sai was almost as annoying about his new favorite anime as he was about Go. He was dreading the day Sai found out about the Yu-gi-oh spin-off series.

---

Some of the professionals, particularly the title-holders, might have said nothing in order to save their pride-but a room full of people could not keep a secret, and this news was too big to be hidden. Every single notable professional in Japan (except for Touya Meijin, who was home with a cold) had been defeated in one evening, by a completely unknown amateur. It was a day that would come to be known throughout the Go world as Black Tuesday.

And one question was flying about the world with the speed of the internet-who was SAI?

---

Sai had already gained something of an international reputation, and it was from the many amateurs watching the games that the news first spread to professionals in Korea, China, Europe, and America.

The first reaction was one of scorn. The title-holders of Japan had been wiped out in one night by one unknown player? That just went to show what everyone knew, that Go in Japan was decaying. Touya Meijin was the only talented player Japan had-the rest could be defeated by an amateur.

Naturally, the Japanese professionals had been none too happy about this critique. In fact, someone (it was probably Kurata) had suggested that the other professionals were blowing hot air, and that none of them would have fared any better against the mysterious Sai. Shortly, the rest of Japan had taken up this rallying cry.

The honor of an entire nation was at stake. The defeated Japanese players began to call and harry famous players from China and

Korea, determined that their shame would be shared with the world. Whether out of curiosity or scorn, foreign professional from around the globe began to take up the challenge, and went online hunting for the player named Sai.

Mitani's sister was working many extra hours because a bout of the flu had struck most of the net café's staff. Hikaru was not about to pass up on computer time if it was free. Most of the professionals found Sai within a week.

This week went down in Go history as Armageddon.

---

Walking home to the train station, Hikaru commented. "We've been playing some insanely strong players recently."

Sai nodded enthusiastically. "I feel like I've made an enormous step towards the Hand of God!"

Hikaru said, "Oh, and I think you're becoming a little famous. Morishita-sensei was going over one of your games the other day in class. And Waya actually asked me if I hadn't heard of Sai!" Waya claimed that Sai was famous, but Hikaru didn't completely believe him. Waya was prone to exaggeration.

Sai said, "We should play some of these games over ourselves, once we get home. It will be good practice for you."

"Uh-huh. You know, if all these Net players are so strong, I wonder what a real professional title holder would be like. Do you think we've played any professionals?"

"I want to play Touya Meijin!" Sai exclaimed.

Hikaru turned back to the computer. "We only have a few more minutes left today, no time to start another game. I think I'll look up some movies. Do you think Akira would like to see that new American movie about the superheroes, or do you think he'd rather

watch one about the Meji era? I mean, if I were hypothetically to ask Akira to see a movie, which I haven't decided."

---

Somewhere else, Akira Touya was crouched on his bed with his covers over his head staring at the computer screen, muttering under his breath, "It's not my fault, it's not my fault, it's not my fault..."

# Chapter 4

## Hikaru no Girl

---

### Chapter 4: Go Professionals Can Be Kind of Scary When Their Fuseki is Invaded

---

At that devastating dinner, as one professional after another fell and the food was forgotten in favor of crowding around the computer screen, for the final game Honinbo Kuwabara had played again and this time the other players had gathered around and given him advice on each move (which Akira had thought was sort of cheating) and even so, they had lost. And afterwards they had all turned as one towards Akira, who was eyeing the door as politeness warred with survival instinct.

"Akira-kun! Would you care to introduce me to your charming Net friend? I would almost suspect you and your father of playing a little practical joke on us, were it not for the fact that the player had a very old-fashioned style, and that I know Koyo Touya is completely computer illiterate. So? Now that you've set us up so neatly, what was the point?"

"I didn't set you up," Akira said. "I happened to have heard from a friend that there was a really strong player named Sai on the net. You came up with the idea to challenge him on your own. I don't know anything about him. Or her. Probably some really strong professional from Korea or China."

Kurata asked, "Then why were you talking about a player who couldn't enter tournaments? Someone who was sick or in the hospital, you said?"

Akira said, "I was only making conversation. It had nothing to do with Sai."

Kuwabara cackled, "Now where might you have the opportunity to meet someone from China or Korea, young Akira?"

"Oh, this person isn't a foreign professional," Ogata said. "Akira bites his bottom lip when he lies, don't you Akira?"

The world had lost a great evil mastermind the day Ogata had taken up Go, Akira thought sourly.

The interrogation continued all night. Akira had stuck to his story and was certain that he became less convincing with every repetition. He was allowed to escape when his mother called to ask why he was out past his curfew; she had insisted that Ogata drive him home.

Ogata had been making more appearances than usual at the Touya house. Quite a few other people had started to find excuses to come over as well. Akira tried not to be in the house. He could only be grateful that no one had said anything to his father, as he wasn't sure he could have resisted pressure from that front. (The truth was, Japan was rather proud of having one of the few professionals in existence who hadn't yet fallen to Sai, and no one wanted to tell Touya Meijin about the Saint of Net Go for fear he'd instantly decide to seek out the strong player.)

Yesterday, Akira had walked in on Ogata and another professional he barely knew (except that he might have been at that fateful dinner) discussing how Akira's game style seemed to have been influenced by Sai, and trying to narrow down Akira's acquaintances into possible suspects. He was starting to feel like a deer during hunting season.

He could have taken all the pressure off himself by telling them the truth. He had originally wanted to introduce Sai to the Go world. The problem was, Akira had realized exactly why Hikaru tried to keep Sai a secret-too late.

The male Hikaru personality was a genuinely talented Go player. He was inexperienced and reckless and unorthodox, but he was improving at an amazing rate. But no one who ever saw Sai play would even give Hikaru a chance.

If Sai and Hikaru were revealed as one and the same, the entire Go world would seek him out. And if Hikaru tried to enter the professional world with his weaker personality, no matter how magnificently he played, he would be met with nothing but disappointment. They would hound him and harry him to bring out Sai. And maybe the first doctor who tried to cure him of DID would want to keep the "genius" personality and eliminate Hikaru. It wasn't fair and it wasn't right. And it bore a strong resemblance to the way Akira had treated at first Hikaru, as he now remembered with shame.

Akira actually understood how the weaker version of Hikaru must feel. Akira himself had faced high expectations as Touya Meijin's son. He'd usually been able to meet them with ease, but it had still been frustrating to know that people judged him by his father's skill not his own. Yes, Akira understood exactly why Hikaru wanted to keep Sai secret.

Last night, Akira had searched for news of Sai on the internet. A wealthy Go professional had offered a reward for any information leading to Sai's identity. Other players and Go fans had decided to contribute as well. The total amount was now at 1,200,000 yen and increasing daily.

Akira wasn't sleeping very well these days.

---

With Akira and Hikaru playing every weekend, it made sense for them to start meeting at the train station and walk over to the Go salon together.

Akira was attempting to subtly find out if Hikaru knew anything about the tsunami he'd generated across the Go world. But today he was meeting Sai-Hikaru not Hikaru-Hikaru, and this version was as

uncommunicative as ever. Occasionally, if he was persistent, he could get a one-word answer typed on a cell phone.

He'd been watching Hikaru closely for changes in expression that might pass as communication, so it was really only a coincidence that he caught a glimpse of Ogata's reflection in the glass.

Ogata was just about to turn the corner. Akira's heart stopped. In his mind, he could see exactly how this would play out.

"Why Akira, who is your lady friend?" Ogata will ask mockingly. "Sai Shindo," Hikaru will mumble. "Oh, *Sai* ? How interesting. And what are you doing with Akira? Playing Go? How even more *interesting* . Mind if I come along? Can I make a phone call first?"

And then, if Akira is very unlucky, Ogata perhaps even recognize that this teenager dressed as a girl (in a rather fetching yellow sundress, Akira can't help noticing) is the same boy he ran into at a Go tournament. And then? Akira's mind goes blank.

Glancing around frantically for an escape, Akira's eye caught on a poster. "Oh, *Space Battleship Yamato* is out in theatres! I've been waiting to see that!" he babbled, yanking on Hikaru's arm. As Ogata approached, Akira began to attempt to half-drag, half-carry Hikaru into the movie theatre.

This did not work as well as he planned, as Hikaru was too heavy. Luckily, once he'd gotten over his surprise he allowed Akira pull him inside the double doors just as Ogata turned the corner.

"But we were going to play Go?" Hikaru asked, and then for some reason repeated the question in a high falsetto.

"We can do that later?" Akira suggested, peeking out the door to see if Ogata was still outside. He was.

"What are you looking at?" Hikaru asked from right behind him. His breath ghosted against Akira's neck.

"Nothing! Hik-uh, Sai, um, let's go watch, uh, that movie."

"You mean *Space Battleship Yamato* ?"

"Only if I have to," Akira said glumly.

"I want to see *13 Assassins*," Hikaru suggested (ignoring Sai's protests that *My Darling is a Foreigner* looked like a more romantic movie).

---

Ogata was no longer outside the theatre after the movie. It was a sign of Akira's increasing paranoia that he actually checked before stepping outside.

"That movie was great," Hikaru enthused. "I think the villain was my favorite character. In the love-to-hate-him sense."

"It was better than I expected," Akira admitted. At some point in the movie, Hikaru had switched from his "Sai" personality to his "Hikaru" personality. He didn't seem to have noticed.

"Do you really think so? What types of movies do you normally see?"

Akira searched his mind. "My mother likes to watch dramas. My father sometimes watches historical films."

"And you never go to the movies yourself? What a waste. Look, I have a shelf of old samurai movies at my house, and some great Hollywood movies with subtitles. My parents are eating out tonight and won't be back until late. Want to come over for a few hours?" He didn't wait for an answer before dragging Akira off.

Once at Hikaru's house, there was a girl of all things at his doorstep. "Hikaru, I need my wig back, I brought a new hair pin I want to try. Who is this? Oh, could you be Akira?"

"O-oh." Hikaru looked down, as if remembering the dress for the first time. "Look, Akira, I just remembered that I have to do girl things. With this girl here. Just give me a second and I'll send out my brother to watch movies with you instead." With that, he bolted into the house.

Hikaru couldn't be serious, could he? He must know that Akira knows. There is no way he would be that stupid, or think that Akira is that stupid. Right?

"I'm Akira Touya, nice to meet you," he said to the girl.

She replied, "Akari Fujisaki. Sai is my little sister. I've heard so much about you!" She winked at him.

Just when Akira thinks that the universe can go no more insane, Hikaru Shindo demonstrates in some graphic fashion that he is wrong.

---

The reward on information leading to the identity of Sai the Saint of Net Go has reached 3,200,000 yen. Some people are talking about hiring a private detective to look for Sai.

Someone has posted that Akira Touya is rumored to have information about Sai's identity.

Sai is really happy about all the people online who want to play him.

---

The crisis was mostly Akira's fault, later events suggested. Hikaru could have been more careful, but he had no reason to be. Akira was the one who knew about the reward, and the fact that it was now public knowledge that he had a connection to Sai.

But Akira had been desperate. Sai had completely disappeared off the net a week ago, and professionals from around Japan had been stopping by to interrogate him. Yesterday, Lee Rinshin from China

had stopped by too. His father must have noticed something was up because he was starting to make conversation in a way that was almost asking questions.

After being questioned at their last game, Hikaru had explained that his sister Sai was no longer playing Net Go because a friend of theirs had been letting her play for free at a net café, but had now caught a flu bug that had been going around and was out sick. She would probably be back at work in a few days, but Akira couldn't wait a few days. In desperation, he had decided offer "Sai" his own laptop on indefinite loan. Akira was not looking forward to explaining to his parents where his computer was, but he enjoyed even less the prospect of explaining to reporters that he really couldn't say anything to the rumors that Sai was in his hospital on his deathbed or quitting Go or kidnapped by aliens. And so he'd brought his laptop to his weekly Sunday game with Sai.

He had no idea that Mr. Amano from "Go Weekly" was following him. How could he know?

And Seiji Ogata dropping in to ask him to return a Go book he'd borrowed from Akira's father was really nothing but a nasty coincidence.

---

"You sure you don't mind me using your laptop to play a game here?" Hikaru-Sai asked, in a whisper. "I know you don't want to miss our game. I'd play at home, except we don't have a computer so we don't get internet."

"There are a few restaurants with free wireless. Or a net café might charge less if you bring your own computer," Akira suggested. "But I think it would be a great idea for you to play a game *right now*. We can play afterwards." Honinbo Kuwabara was coming over for dinner at the Touya house that night. Akira would be very happy if Sai would make a reappearance before then.

Hikaru-Sai opened her mouth, then seemed to remember that she didn't talk on Sundays, and attempted with her eyes to convey an interesting combination of polite gratitude, indifference to the manner in which games were played, and the idea that actually paying money to play Net Go was unthinkable. Then she logged in and began looking for an opponent.

The sight of a computer was a siren call for the reporter lurking sketchily inside. He blew past Ms. Ichikawa and was behind Hikaru and Akira before there was time to think about closing the laptop.

"Sai! I knew it," Mr. Amano declared, pointing at the screen. "You're just a kid! Amazing! Would you care to give an interview? And your real name?" He reached for his camera.

At the word "interview" Hikaru realized he was dealing with a reporter. A jolt of horror shot straight up his spine. Newspaper headlines danced through Hikaru's head: "Famous Go Genius Actually a Cross-Dressing Boy! Mother Commits Seppuku in Remorse! Neighbor Girl Tells Sickening Story of How He Stole Her Uniform! Experts Blame Exposure to Manga!" True, Go didn't normally make Japanese headlines in regular newspapers, but Hikaru was willing to bet that they'd make an exception for a story like this. They'd probably call it "human interest."

When he saw the camera, he ran for his life. A few too many curious people were now crowded between him and the door, so he bolted for the women's restrooms.

The pressure of a room full of gazes now fell hard on Akira Touya, who planted himself between the crowd and the restroom door.

Smiling like a shark, Mr. Amano said, "It's a pleasure to see you again, Akira Touya. Would you care to make a comment?"

Akira shook his head.

"Your friend will have to come out of there. Or, would one of the ladies present volunteer to go in? If you'll take my camera, then I'll pay."

"Don't," Akira pleaded. If someone caught a picture of Hikaru, it would be all over. "Leave us alone, please."

Mr. Amano looked a tad guilty at bullying middle-schoolers, but he rallied. "This is the biggest scoop in Go all year... no, perhaps even in the entire decade! I can't very well let it go."

A murmur went through the crowd. The regulars who Akira knew and often played him were suddenly all potential enemies.

Mr. Amano continued, "Everyone here wants to know who Sai is, don't they? The Saint of Net Go, the mystery in the shadows, the modern legend?"

Inside the bathroom, Hikaru was discovering that there were no windows to jump out of. Sai offered a stream of unhelpful advice while he clamped his hands over his ears and prayed. There was no way out. He was caught, and even being caught as Sai was the least of his worries at this point. No, not the least of his worries. Just two days before the professional test, and this! What would Waya and Isumi say? What if they reacted as if they'd been betrayed, the way Yuki had when he decided he wanted to become a professional? What if he was never allowed to play a Go game as himself again? Suddenly he understood Sai's desperation to play Go, as he now felt it himself.

And Sai? He'd once commented that the one thing he didn't miss from his last life was the backstabbing that came with being famous. Sai like playing everyone, weak and strong, with honor and love for the game. But once the sordid story hit the papers and he was exposed as a cross-dressing pathological liar, Sai would be treated as a curiosity by all his future opponents, not as a worthy opponent. He would be stuck playing people who treated him as a circus

attraction. Hikaru was seriously considering whether he and Sai might not fare better living in South America for a while.

"I won't let you in," he heard Akira tell someone outside. Hikaru felt a wave of gratitude, and even though this mess was really all Akira's fault to begin with, he still wanted to apologize for dragging him into this.

Mr. Amano said, "You owe a duty to the Go world to bring Sai into the open."

"He's not Sai." Akira swallowed noisily. "I am."

# Chapter 5

## Hikaru no Girl

---

See end for new notes

---

### Chapter 5: When in Tsumego: Panic!

---

*"He's not Sai." Akira swallowed noisily. "I am."*

---

The room froze, and Akira wondered what he had been thinking. But there, there was that dawning look of realization in Mr. Amano's eyes. It was much easier for him to believe that Akira *Touya* was the genius who had defeated the entire Go world than to accept it was some random middle-schooler who wasn't even a professional. It shouldn't have been believable to anyone who had seen Akira play. But people always looked at Akira through the lens of his father's talent, and for once that would work in his favor. He just might be able to pull this off.

That, of course, was when the door swung open and the second worst thing that could happen to him today walked in.

Ogata said, "Akira, I thought I saw you in the window. Would you mind giving something to your father for me? I need to return one of his books." He looked around the room, clearly wondering why everyone was standing up.

Mr. Amano smiled. "Excellent timing. Ogata-sensei, would you mind playing a game with Akira here? I need to test a claim of his."

---

Sweat trickled down the back of Akira's neck, and he resisted the urge to wipe it off with his hand. The less nervous he appeared, the better chance he had of pulling this off. Ogata knew him entirely too well, and his eyes were boring through his glasses with laser-like intensity. The bastard was only going along with this without explanation because for an adult, Ogata enjoyed making other people squirm far too much.

One wrong word and Ogata would be explaining exactly why Akira couldn't be Sai. Luckily, Mr. Amano was not willing to spill his big news to another major player in the Go world, not until after publication. Akira shuddered inwardly at the thought of "publication," but this was not something he could afford to worry about when he needed all his concentration for the game.

Hikaru was still trapped in the bathroom. Mr. Amano would not be convinced unless he won the game. And Ogata was at the level to challenge Akira's father-Akira had never beaten him before.

The problem was not only playing at Sai's level, which Akira knew was beyond his own, but also playing in Sai's style. Akira could have played the best game of his life or he could have tried to imitate another player-he wasn't sure if he could pull off both.

He made a rather old-fashioned move. Except that Sai was no longer playing in an old style as much these days, was he? Ogata was eyeing him suspiciously. The last thing Akira needed was for him to start taking the game more seriously.

He would not allow himself to be afraid. To give anything less than your full attention to a game was to disrespect Go, his father said. Akira drew on every memory of every game he had ever played with Hikaru, both of them, and played.

If there was thing Akira knew how to do, it was play Go. The regulars at the salon were already his fans, and he drew every one into a crowd around the table. Even the damn reporter was fixated.

He lasted fifteen minutes before he was finally driven into a corner. There was no move he could see that wouldn't let Ogata claim most his stones in a few more turns. This was where any reasonable person would resign.

Mr. Amano didn't seem to have noticed that the game was at a close; he studied Go, but he was no professional. Ogata, however, was looking at him in a way that clearly said, "Set down that stone and stop wasting my time. You're finished."

Akira considered his options. He could tackle Mr. Amano to the ground and scream for Hikaru to run. Alas, that would leave no one to pin down Ogata. What if he faked a heart attack? Would Ogata's compassion override his Sai-fixation? Akira wouldn't count on it. If he had a pocketknife, he could hold it to his own throat and order everyone out of the salon. "If" being the key word in that sentence.

Naturally, that was when Akira spotted a familiar pair of bleached bangs bobbing above the crowd.

Hikaru, dressed again in jeans and his stupid orange jacket, was *standing on top of a table so Akira could see him. Waving. At. HIM.*

Akira's heart did a good imitation of screaming and hiding behind his liver. Carefully not making eye contact, Akira frantically gestured his hand towards the door. Hikaru grinned at him. To someone who knew Hikaru as well as Akira did, this was a smile that said, "I, Hikaru Shindo, genius that I am, finally noticed that I left my bag in the bathroom a full week ago. Now no one will be able to recognize me, even though all I did was change my clothes! I'm not the least bit worried that the people who see me here every weekend will wonder why I suddenly appeared at the same time my 'sister' disappeared. And it would never dawn on me that either Mr. Amano or Ogata-sensei could recognize me on sight, and Ogata at least would definitely check to see whether I actually have a sister or not. Nope, I am happily oblivious to your pain and suffering."

"You keep looking at the door. Do you have somewhere you need to go, Akira?" Ogata asked. "I'll hardly be offended if you end the game now."

Akira grabbed for another stone. Ogata raised an eyebrow, clearly thinking he was a sore loser.

Behind him, Hikaru held up seven fingers, then two.

He was trying to tell Akira where to play. How could he even see the board from there? But he must be able to, because the move was ingenious. Akira placed a stone down on 7-2. Ogata frowned, raising his head off his hand and staring at the board.

Hikaru held up one finger, then one, then one, then eight. What did that mean? 11-8 or 1-18?

When Akira hesitated, Hikaru began to mouth something. The next move, obviously. Unfortunately, Akira had no skills at lip-reading.

What were those words?

Us oo a-y?

Ust oos aweady?

Just lose already?

Akira fought off the urge to leap over the table and strangle Hikaru.

Hikaru jabbed a finger at the door. Ms. Ichikawa was still at her post behind the counter at the entrance, and there was no chance of *her* not recognizing Hikaru. It occurred to Akira that Hikaru might not be oblivious so much as resigned to his fate.

Judging the expression on his face, Hikaru possibly thought he was being noble and self-sacrificing. Akira reached towards a random point on the board, desperate to keep the attention of the room still

on him. There was no way he was letting Hikaru be caught. Not if he had carry him out of this place himself.

A voice, low and gentle, whispered in Akira's ear, "Play 11-8."

Akira dropped the stone into place without thinking. He stared at his own hand as if it had turned strange to him. Ogata was now riveted to the board, and the crowd pulled in tighter, sensing the change in the flow of the game.

On his next turn, the voice whispered, "Now 4-12."

Hands trembling, Akira put down the stone. What was this voice? The God of Go?

It was as if a river had started flowing upstream. In a few moves, the game was on even footing. In a few more, Akira was holding the stronger position. But when Ogata finally said, "I resign," all Akira could think was that Hikaru was still standing on the damn table.

That said, Akira himself was still pinioned between Mr. Amano and Ogata. Who looked ready to split him in two so they could each take home half.

There was one thing Akira was sure he could count on the regulars and Ms. Ichikawa for. Cupping his hands to his mouth, Akira shouted, "Everyone, I just beat a 10-dan!"

The cheers were overwhelming as they mobbed him.

On the plus side, this cleared the way to the door. Under the cover of the crowd, Hikaru made a run for it. A few stomped on feet and elbowed midsections later and Akira was hot on his heels.

Hikaru was first out the door, but he waited outside. As Akira stumbled out, he exclaimed, "What are you doing? Don't you realize that you're the one who's-"

"Shut up and run," Hikaru said. And they did.

---

Later, at Hikaru's house, they both bent over wheezing as they caught their breath. There had been no real need to run once they had reached the train, but neither had really felt safe until they were indoors. Akira supposed he could have gone home, but it had never occurred to him not to follow Hikaru.

Hikaru asked, "Won't you be in just as much trouble as me, now that everyone thinks that you're Sai?"

"I expect that Mr. Amano is talking to Ogata-sensei right now, and discovering that I have an alibi for the first game he played with Sai." That fateful dinner, which Akira had never mentioned to Hikaru. "On the other hand, now they'll both be coming after me for Sai's identity. But it's still better than *Go Weekly* getting a photo of you. Any of your friends could have identified you, and then you would have to explain about the cross-dressing."

Hikaru stuttered, "I don't know what you mean. I was just passing through, my sister called me for help, and-"

"Hikaru, I know it's you. I know they're both you, but when you start talking it means you stopped being Sai. It's fine, I know you can't help the DID."

"DID?"

"Dissociative Identity Disorder. It's what they call people like you, with two personalities."

"Two...? Akira, it's really not like that."

"I've read a lot," Akira continued. "And I just want you to know that both your personalities are exceptional Go players that I am honored to have met, and they both deserve to play. I will support you however I can."

Hikaru said, "Akira-look, I think there's something I should tell you. I don't have a split personality. I'm just possessed by this ghost, and he really likes to play Go. He's the one who got me started on the game."

Akira stared at Hikaru. Then he walked over and placed both his hands on Hikaru's shoulders, looking him straight in the eye. "I understand, this is just another delusion. I promise I'll help you and I'll never tell anyone. We can find a psychiatrist with doctor-patient confidentiality. If we pay for it together, you don't even have to tell your parents. We'll get through this."

Hikaru looked frantic. "Akira, I'm telling the truth! I'm-he's-" He threw up his hands.

Something remarkable was happening. Behind Hikaru, a faint shape was outlined in the air. A white robe, a tall black cap, a hint of dark hair.

A voice, the same one he'd heard during his game with Ogata, whispered, "Look after Hikaru for me, Akira. He's very important to me." From behind a fan, someone smiled at him, then vanished.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Hikaru demanded. "I'm not telling him that! Look, Akira, Sai is right behind me, and he's acting like an idiot like usual."

Akira's eyes had gone big as saucers, and he pointed shakily.

"Did you see him?" Hikaru asked in amazement. No one had ever seen Sai before.

"Just for a second. What was that?"

"Just Sai. He's harmless. We're friends, he taught me how to play Go. He says you have talent, and that's coming from Honinbo Shusaku, just so you know."

"There was a game-playing ghost? He doesn't mind-crush anyone, does he?"

Akira was clearly babbling, so Hikaru politely ignored him.

Akira looked insanely cute with his face flushed and his hair mussed from running. He still had his hands on Hikaru's shoulders and his face was just inches away. It was completely without thinking that Hikaru leaned over and kissed him.

"Murshahsezwaz?" Akira said.

Hikaru's heart stopped. This was the moment that would make or break everything.

Carefully, he said, "Are we still on for next weekend? Same time, new place?"

Akira nodded, and that was alright then.

---

"Hi-ka-ru," Sai sang. "You owe me a favor!"

"I don't see what I owe you," Hikaru grumbled. He thought of the brief hint of Akira's lips on his. "Okay, maybe I owe you for convincing Akira that I wasn't crazy. I suppose you want to play Go?"

"I want to play Touya Meijin!"

"... I should have known."

"You can arrange something! You see his son all the time now! You can get an invitation to his house! "

"I can?"

"You can." Sai nodded confidently.

"But how am I supposed to let you play him without him knowing that it's me? I don't want to set up a 'I-must-play-the-one-who-defeated-me' situation with another Touya, and I don't think he'd believe me if I told him I was haunted by a ghost. He seems too stoic to buy it."

"Then I'm sure you can think of a good story to tell him."

Hikaru looked thoughtful. "Well, now that you mention it, an idea is starting to come to me. A very clever one."

Sai almost felt guilty. But then, a chance to face Touya Meijin? He couldn't resist. All potential fall-out paled before that.

Hikaru began, "First of all, I'm going to need to ask Akari to help me find a few things-"

---

*This concludes Part I of Hikaru no Girl*

*Part II will be forthcoming*

# Chapter 6

Author's Note:

Hikaru No Girl lives!

I was originally planning to post this sequel as a new story. However, I thought it would be fairer to people who had story alerts to keep using the current story. (It was completely *not* because I couldn't think of a new summary and I liked my current title. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.)

I will endeavor not to disappoint with part 2.

---

## Hikaru no Girl

### Part 2:

---

#### Prologue:

*Four Years After the Events of Part 1:*

Mr. Amano published an article suggesting that Sai was a teenage girl. This some attracted publicity but was not considered to be proven. Currently the "school girl Sai" theory has a roughly equal following compared to: Sai is a hospital invalid, Sai is Touya Meijin's wife, Sai is a group of professionals collaborating, Sai is an artificial intelligence, and Sai is an alien.

Hikaru passed his pro test and is considered a rising star in the Go world. He plays Go as Sai even more frequently thanks to free computer access at Akira's house. Akari continues to blackmail him into playing dress-up with her.

Waya and Isumi took the pro test shortly after Hikaru and both passed. Waya has formed an investigative group in order to locate Sai. After discovering that Hikaru is Akira's friend (and Akira is widely believed to have some connection to Sai) Waya forced Hikaru to join his group.

There are twenty-five days to the Hokuto Cup.

Sai still has yet to play Touya Meijin.

---

### **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number One: The Inability Of Many Senior Citizens To Use Modern Technology Is A Serious Disability, Which Requires More In-Depth Medical Research**

---

*Attempt Number 206:*

Koyo Touya was minding his own business setting a pot of tea to boil on his stove when he was rudely interrupted by a long scrapping sound, and two sharp bangs. His door was being abused, apparently by someone attempting to make as much noise as possible. This was followed up with by a loud shout of, "Gosh, Akira, it is lucky your father is not home so we can have a secret and private conversation!"

There was the sound of some papers rustling, and, "Yes, I am completely under the impression that the house is empty right now." The words were recited in a monotone.

"I've heard there is a new and exciting computer program that allows people to communicate with others around the world without leaving their room. Isn't that remarkable?"

"Yes it is. You can even play Go. This is called Net Go and can be found at [www. pandanet-igs. com](http://www.pandanet-igs.com)."

"It is a pity that your father doesn't know about this. With him getting on in his years, it could be useful for him."

"Yes, I worry constantly about his health. He might have a heart attack while driving somewhere to play Go. It would take a great weight off my mind if I knew he was safe at home and-Hikaru, I just can't do this!"

"Dammit, Akira, this is why I gave you a script!"

"My father is going to kill me. No, he's going to give me a 'look' and I'm going to kill myself from shame."

"You promised me!"

"Hikaru, you know full well that the only reason that I help you with any of your dumb ideas is that I don't want a repeat of the time you and Akari almost set my father on fire."

Sullenly, "You promised not to mention that again."

There was the sound of someone running up the stairs, followed by, "Akira, if you don't come back and finish this, I'm going to wear the Gothic Lolita dress tomorrow! You know how you hate the way people stare at that dress! Akira, come back!"

Koyo Touya had adopted a policy of non-interference in his son's social life, as he trusted that Akira was a sensible boy who could take care of himself. He was beginning to reconsider that policy.

---

Hikaru knocked on Akira's door. "Hey, look, I'm sorry I shouted. I know it was a stupid plan to begin with."

*The problem is, all of your plans are stupid,* Akira thought, but he said, "You can come in."

Hikaru opened the door. Behind him, a half-transparent figure floated in. "I apologize as well, Akira. Hikaru is only trying to help me."

Akira said, "Sai is starting to fade out again. I should play another game for him, soon."

After Akira had caught his first glimpse of Hikaru's ghostly friend, he'd assumed it would be permanent, but five days later Sai's body and voice began to fade away under Akira's eyes-although Hikaru assured him Sai was still there, hanging over their shoulders watching them play.

A bit of trial and error had revealed an important discovery: Akira's ability to see Sai was restored *after he played a game as Sai* . Not played a game *with* Sai, but played while moving the pieces under Sai's instruction. This led Akira to conclude that it had been the fact that he had declared his identity to be Sai while playing Ogata that had allowed him to first hear Sai's voice.

*(Hikaru had commented, "It's a good thing I didn't know that Sai would fade away if I just ignored him for a bit. I never would have started playing Go!" Sai had looked very very nervous, leading Akira to contemplate lecturing Hikaru about the proper way to treat a legendary Go genius' ghost, but it wasn't as though lecturing Hikaru had ever accomplished anything in the past.)*

Akira was usually even happier to play games for Sai than Hikaru was, as he viewed it as a learning experience. Not to mention the celebrity of being around the mind behind Honinbo Shusaku. However, except for short separations the ghost remained physically stuck to Hikaru, and no amount of experiments had revealed why.

Sometimes it could be a bit awkward to have a third person hanging around watching you-such as right now, when Akira was having a fight with his boyfriend.

"Hikaru, you know I'm not sure about letting my father play Net Go at all, ever. He's a menace around technology. Mother doesn't let him

touch the microwave or the TV."

"There's no other way for him to play Sai! You were the one who crushed all my disguise ideas."

"Because your disguises are terrible. I don't have a better idea, I know. But my father has already destroyed several innocent computers. And don't you remember what happened the last time when you left him on the Internet unsupervised? My father almost had his entire retirement savings stolen out from under him by someone in Nigeria!"

"It's not my fault."

"Hikaru, we discussed this. We do not leave my father alone in a room with a computer under any circumstances. I let him use my laptop once to check the weather, and it took me a month to get rid of all the viruses! And my father hates Net Go so this isn't likely to work anyway. I'm tired of suffering for your stupidity."

"Akira, that's not fair! You know how tough it's been to keep my secret."

Akira did know, seeing how he'd been the main person running interference for Hikaru for the past four years. At the moment, he was in no mood to bond over that.

Unfortunately, it was justified to say that hiding Sai had been even more of a headache for Akira than Hikaru. Although Mr. Amano's story had if anything provided some misdirection to Sai's identity, seeing how he thought Sai was a girl, he had confirmed Akira's connection to Sai. Even more importantly, that he had confirmed Sai was being actively hidden by Akira.

The Japanese Go professionals who had been at that fateful dinner where Akira had introduced Sai to the world had already suspected Akira-now the entire world suspected him. To make matters worse, the article had been well-written and exciting enough that even the

majority of the Japanese population that didn't particularly care about Go had started to get interested in the mysterious hunt for the hidden genius player. (The increasing monetary reward offered for Sai's identity had certainly helped as well.) In the Asian part of the world, Sai had become a serious celebrity, helped along by Japanese Go industry milking the publicity for all it was worth in an attempt to revitalize their favorite game.

A worthy goal, Akira knew. But he was less happy that he got an average of two to three hundred emails a week from various people (aka ranting lunatics) wanting to tell him who they guessed Sai was, pester him for hints, or berate him for not sharing his knowledge with the world-and that was after he'd changed his email address twice.

It was still bad, but the fuss had died down compared to four years ago. Also, after his father (abetted by Hikaru) had sent his last computer into an electronic coma, Akira had taken the opportunity to get a very good junk mail filter. So Akira really wasn't sure why he had the urge to complain to Hikaru *now* when he had been more tolerant originally. Maybe it was just a displacement of other frustrations with their relationship.

Assuming they were in a relationship. They were dating, right? They'd gone on dates, or date-like activities such as seeing movies and Go parlors. (Sai generally tagged along as well, but the ghost did have the consideration to leave them alone sometimes, so Akira didn't think Sai was the problem.) They saw each other almost every day, and Hikaru dropped by Akira's house or vice versa every weekend. Hikaru had kissed Akira, more than once. But nothing had really developed since they'd been, well, twelve. Akira was starting to wonder if he'd mistaken the kind of play-dating you did in kindergarten for real dating.

Akira was lost in thought, and taken off guard when Hikaru hugged him from behind.

"Forget about this boring stuff. Another plan down the drain, and yes, you told me so. Why don't you play me as Sai for one game, then we

can log in to the net for a while. Or on second thought-look what I brought!" Hikaru held up a DVD. " *Children Who Chase Lost Voices* . You know this just came out on DVD today, right? But you didn't get to see it while it was in theatres so I marked the release date on my calendar, got one of the first copies. It's a present, by the way. I was going to make it a celebration for Sai's game with your father."

Akira pounced on the DVD. "Your horrible play script is completely forgiven." The move brought his face next to Hikaru's, and he leaned upwards-

Sai, floating behind Hikaru, snapped his fan up to cover his face, and mask a wide smile. Akira pulled back; Hikaru didn't seem to notice.

On second thought, maybe Sai was to blame for a great deal of Akira's relationship difficulties.

---

Meanwhile, the number one source of Hikaru's hiding Sai problems was sitting in darkened room in front of his computer screen, coffee mug in hand. He wore a T-shirt saying "Play Go: If you have the stones" and a pair of thin-framed, elegant glasses.

In the center of the room was a bulletin board covered with color-coded notes, newspaper articles, pieces of evidence, arrows, and bits of string. At the very center was a picture of Akira Touya.

At his computer, Seiji Ogata updated his Sai spreadsheet with Akira's confirmed location (at his home) during Sai's last recorded game. The pattern indicated that Akira was at home, with Hikaru Shindo as a guest, for roughly three-fifths of Sai's games, more than could be coincidental. None of these games occurred when Ogata was invited to the Touya house, which he also suspected was not a coincidence. Clearly the two of them had some advance knowledge of when Sai would play, and were taking the opportunity to watch his games as any Go fan would.

Past patterns told Ogata that Sai had a knack for gathering talented youth around him. Hikaru Shindo's style had clearly been influenced enormously by Sai, Akira to a lesser degree. These young protégées were the people most likely to have clues to Sai's identity.

Naturally, Ogata had taken the opportunity to lay down some bait himself. It had been easy to recruit Waya, who had been fascinated by Sai since losing a game to him even before he became famous. He was also ideally positioned around Hikaru Shindo, the second epicenter of evidence (color-coded orange).

However, Hikaru had continued to vigorously deny any connections to Sai, even to his fellow insei. Next, Ogata had launched a sneak attack, bringing in Isumi, who seemed less the same type as Hikaru in personality, but who clearly had a large pool of untapped talent and was in need of a mentor—just the type Sai seemed to pick. Ogata had thought he might be on to something when Hikaru began giving Isumi some uncharacteristically intelligent advice. But the fish had cleverly nibbled on the bait and escaped intact.

When the group of insei he had been watching had universally passed the professional test, Ogata began analyzing the playing styles of the next batch of students looking for Sai's influence. However, there was no indication that Sai had sought out a new student, and Ogata began to fear he'd lost his one lead.

Then Ogata had realized he had a secret weapon. One thing Sai must covet above all others. One crown jewel that remained out of reach.

Touya Meijin.

Although by now rumors of Sai had reached him, Koyo remained uninterested in a player who wouldn't sit across a board from him in person. Such a mask might hide a group of people playing together while relying on books (which Koyo saw as cheating) or a computer intelligence as some rumors claimed (which Koyo possessed a deep

scorn for). Furthermore, the champion remained stubbornly disconnected (and inept) with technology in all forms.

It had been easy for Ogata to work his way into his former teacher's confidence. Easy for him to take over the job of making sure Koyo's cell phone was charged, organizing his contacts list, installing his DVD player and other miscellaneous pieces of technology, and setting up his internet.

Even Akiko, Koyo's wife, had become his ally, as apparently pieces of technology touched by Koyo Touya had a tendency to end up dying mysterious deaths. Ogata had been a savior to her drama-watching hobby, as she'd been afraid to buy a color TV before for fear of what might happen to the expensive device. The family now had an actual desktop, not just laptops that could be quickly removed from any room that Father entered!

Now that he had inserted himself into Koyo's confidence, Ogata knew he could convince his friend to let him create a Net Go account. He would only have to arrange for a foreign player whom Koyo respected to request a game. But Koyo wouldn't be interested in playing strangers or weaklings-he would let Ogata set up his games. Soon, Ogata would be the only one in Net Go with access to Koyo Touya. Then, Sai would have to come to him!

Four long year of planning were about to pay off. Ogata took a moment to bask in his own brilliance.

In his mind, his conversation with Sai would go something like this:

Sai: Please, wonderful and talented Ogata-sensei, could you arrange a game for me with Touya Meijin? I'd do anything!

Ogata: This won't come for free. I have some demands.

Sai: \*gasp\*

Ogata: Hand over your name, address, and cell phone number, or Koyo Touya's computer experiences a tragic "malfunction."

Sai: I'll do anything! Please don't pull the plug in the middle of our game!

Ogata: I also want to be able to play you at least once a week. I want to be included from now on in the practice sessions you have with Akira Touya, Hikaru Shindo, and any other protégées you have. And I want you to autograph a few things for me.

Sai: How do you know so much about me?

Ogata: Well, I am a fan of yours. We could hold the study sessions at my house. I make a great bean dip. Do you like bean dip?

Sai: I love bean dip!

... Deep down, Seiji Ogata was a very lonely person.

---

*To be continued...*

## Chapter 7

### Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Two: Being Clueless Is Less Of A Problem When Your Friends Are Kind Of Clueless Too

---

The username was "AwesomeComputer07," and just to remove any doubt, a message under the name read "This player is a computer program created by the Go Institute in China. Please help us improve our development of artificial intelligence by playing a game."

Some traditional Go players scorned the idea of playing a computer- or perhaps they were simply afraid of being beaten by a machine. Others had accepted the challenge, and so far two titleholders and a seven dan player had been defeated-crushed, even-by a computer program created by a group of Chinese students.

"It's SAI! He's accepted our request for a game! Fire up the engines, Bao." Yang Hai gave a smile worthy of an evil genius. "Initiate program Deep Orange!"

How had the famous chess champion Kasparov been defeated? By a computer. One win against the world-renowned Sai would be enough to propel the designers into the realm of legend.

Laughing manically, Yang Hai declared, "Today, we see the end of the reign of the undefeatable Saint of Net Go!"

"Or at least we could beat our record of lasting twenty minutes," Bao said hopefully.

Le Ping expressed the rational thought of, "You are all crazy. I go to study lounge now. Call me when the game is over and Yang Hai has stopped crying over his embarrassing fail."

From a net café in Tokyo, Japan, Sai Fujiwari was cheerfully crushing the hopes and dreams of yet another set of youths (time

clocked: ten minutes). Hikaru idly clicked when told, while watching the latest episode of "One Piece" in another window.

---

Akari plopped an enormous bag down on Hikaru's bed. "This is heavy, it wouldn't hurt you to lend me a hand on the stairs." She reached into the back and pulled out a white dress with a short puffy skirt. "I can't deny I'm excited you changed your mind, but you kept saying that you'd never wear a dress with this many frills. Any special occasion?"

"Oh, I'm just doing this to make you happy," Hikaru lied. It sounded much better than saying that this was his way of passive-aggressively annoying Akira and taking revenge for their fight yesterday while simultaneously distracting him/not-apologizing for the fight yesterday. Plus, there was this movie theatre that gave half-off tickets to the female gender.

Hikaru disappeared into the bathroom, dress in hand, unaware that his words had plunged Akari into contemplative thought.

She knew that Hikaru's ruse with Akira was long since up, so why did he keep letting her come over about once a month? It wasn't because of her original threat of blackmail, was it? Akari was still having fun playing dress-up, but at a more mature age she'd developed moral scruples. Blackmailing people was wrong.

Hikaru emerged from the bathroom. "I got the back of the dress myself, but I'm going to need your help getting the wig to stay on." He sat down on his desk chair, impatiently waving towards the long black wig lying on the bed.

Akari picked up her tools and came over. As she began to put in hair pins, she asked, "Hikaru, it doesn't make you uncomfortable when we do this, right? I know that I was the one who started blackmailing you, but that was when we were just kids."

"Oh, it's horribly uncomfortable," Hikaru assured her.

"Oh. I'm really sorry."

"Don't be sorry, just hurry up and finish with the hairpins so I can stop craning my neck like this."

Akari had a brain-sputter: a word she'd coined solely to describe occasional experiences with Hikaru. "I'll take that as a no, then? You're okay with this?"

Hikaru said, "With the hairpins? I think they'll stay in."

As she finished up, Akari moved on to the make-up kit. Hikaru made a face. "Do we have to? I hate make-up."

"I keep telling you that it's not much of a disguise if you don't let me cover your face-I mean, I don't want to force you into anything. Only what you feel comfortable with."

"It's just, I always smear lipstick everywhere when I eat popcorn. Maybe a tiny bit of eye shadow, that's all. How about the blue?"

"You want the eye shadow with sparkles?"

"I like sparkles," Hikaru said, unabashedly.

As she put the last touches on, Akari complained, "But you still won't let me call you little sister."

"Hah! That will never happen! I'm a whole month and seven days older than you!"

"THAT was all you cared about?"

"Duh. So, do you think the cloth wings on the back of the dress are too much, or just standard for Harajuku?"

Akari wondered why she ever bothered to worry about what Hikaru thought. The obvious answer was, he didn't.

---

Akira said, "I'm not sure that adding fifteen minutes of travel time and switching train lines is really worth the effort just to go to a movie theatre where you get half-price tickets. I keep telling you, if money is that much of a problem then I'll pay for you."

Hikaru said, "Don't be ridiculous, since I can never afford to treat you we're at least going dutch. And you know I've got to give Akari an excuse to bring over clothes every so often, it's the highlight of her boring life."

Sai asked, "Should I feel guilty that I never pay for tickets?"

"You don't take up any space, Sai, so I don't think it's a problem," Akira said.

"Did you just say *Sai* ?"

Akira twitched like a mental patient with a history of electric shock therapy. Why had he ever let his guard down in a public space?

The fact that the person who had spoken was Hikaru's friend Waya, walking together with Isumi and Ochi, did not comfort Akira. After all, all three had been working with Seiji Ogata on tracking down Sai's location.

Hikaru said easily, "We were talking about a movie character, not *that* Sai."

Waya's mouth gaped open. "What is with your clothes?"

Akira's second twitch registered a 7.5 on the Richter Scale. He had, for a brief unfortunate moment, forgotten what Hikaru was currently wearing a white frilly dress. With angel wings on the back.

Hikaru said, "I don't think we've ever met before. My name is Hikaru- absolutely no relation to the one you know."

Akira slapped his forehead. Despite repeated efforts, he had never been able to convince Hikaru that wearing a dress did not in fact

make him unrecognizable to people who knew full well what his face looked like.

Waya, Isumi, and Ochi all gaped, different neurons firing in their brains.

Waya thought, *Clearly Hikaru must have lost some kind of bet.*

Isumi thought, *Hikaru and Akira are playing some kind of joke on us.*

Ochi thought, *Hikaru is playing some kind of joke on Akira.*

Isumi asked, "What movie did you watch?"

"Just a chick flick. I only go because Akira wants to," Hikaru said in a deeply martyred voice.

Waya thought, *Hikaru and Akira are dating. Who didn't see that coming?*

Isumi thought, *I hope Hikaru didn't dress up just because Akira wanted him to. That's not healthy. Wait, what am I thinking? That dress was definitely something Hikaru picked out on his own.*

Ochi thought, *If they're both the girl in the relationship, how does that even work?*

Sai thought, *I want to play Go.*

Waya said, "Look, we were just about head over to my house for the next meeting of the Find Sai task force. Judging from the direction you're heading in, I'm pretty sure you're going to be late."

Hikaru said, "I forgot about that. Look, if you'll give me, oh, fifteen minutes or so, I'll go find the other Hikaru and bring him back here."

Waya said, "Stop messing around, we already know it's you. Look, your bleached bangs are peeking out from under your wig."

Hikaru hastily turned away and adjusted the wig. Then he turned back with a triumphant expression that said, "See? Clearly not Hikaru anymore! Take that!"

Akira said, "Look, I'll see to it that he makes it to the meeting." He began to drag Hikaru away.

Trailing along after, Sai said, "Hikaru, I think your friends might be on to you."

Hikaru said sotto voce, "Would you mind babysitting Sai a bit while I attend the meeting? He always starts talking in response to what they say when they talk about 'Sai' and one of these days I'm going to accidentally answer back."

Akira said, "Sure, no problem. We can play a few games online."

"Great!" They pulled to a halt in front of a public restroom. Hikaru added, "Would you mind carrying my spare clothes back too? I don't want them to see. I need my backpack, it has other stuff in it, but I have paper bag in here. Thanks!"

He disappeared into the restroom, ducking into the men's after confirming no one was around. Akira contemplated that he was stuck riding the train back home holding a shopping bag with a Gothic Lolita dress inside.

Sai said sympathetically, "Relationships were difficult in my day too. I was dumped twice because I skipped romantic activities on various occasions so I could play Go. By the way, happy anniversary of the day you started dating!"

"At least some one noticed," Akira said. Another passerby who walked too close shied away from him. "And when we get home, please try not to talk to me while we're outside of my room. I think my mom is *this* close to making an appointment with a specialist in schizophrenia. How does Hikaru do it?"

Sai said, "I am reasonably certain that Hikaru's parents have already diagnosed their son with mental problems and do not worry about it anymore."

---

At least part of the reason why Hikaru hated Ogata's Find Sai task force was because he hadn't thought of a Make Touya Meijin Play Net Go task force.

Waya said, "The only personal evidence we have is the chat message that Sai sent me after I played a game with him about three years ago. Judging from the content of the message, I have concluded that Sai is rude, immature, and probably stupid in every area except for Go. There's no way an elementary-schooler could possibly be such a strong player, but I haven't completely ruled out a middle-schooler or a very immature high-schooler."

Hikaru muttered, "You're just bitter about being mistaken for a girl. I told you, with a screen name like that anyone could have made that mistake."

The blackboard contained the one online message that Sai had sent in all the games he'd played with famous Go figures from around the world. It said, "Zelda, I'm pretty strong, aren't I? It's cool to meet another girl who plays Go. We should get our nails done together or do other girly stuff."

Hikaru said, "Your screen name is the name of the magical princess from Legend of Zelda. You really should have expected people to think you were a girl. Sai probably just wanted to be friends."

Waya said, "Despite the insulting message, I'm not convinced Sai is a girl. That sounds like the sort of stupid thing that a boy would say while pretending to be a girl, assuming he wasn't too bright."

Hikaru said, "What do you mean wasn't too bright? That sounds exactly like something a girl would say!"

Isumi said, "I think we should also consider that this might have been a fake message. That time was when the rumor first started spreading that Sai was a young girl. What if our mystery player deliberately made such a clumsy message in order to encourage the rumor, as a cover for his real identity?"

Hikaru nodded. "Yes, it was exactly what Isumi said. Except it wasn't a clumsy message."

Ochi demanded, "How would you know, Hikaru? And didn't you just contradict yourself? First you say Sai sounded like a girl to you, now you say that you think it was a trick."

Hikaru said, "It was a trick, but a very clever and not at all stupid one." He paused. "Oops. Ignore everything I just said."

"We always do," Ochi reassured him.

Waya said, "I considered a possible deception, but further evidence shows that Sai never plays during regular school hours, and frequently focuses on weekends, leading me to suspect he or she is a student. Speaking of which, Hikaru, you never show up during Sai's regular Go-playing hour on Saturday at 2:00."

Hikaru said, "I always spend Saturday at 2:00 at Akira's house."

"You could reschedule. You're not showing much commitment to this team."

"You tricked me into being on the team with a box of pocky. And now I've eaten all the pocky, so I'm not sure why I'm still here."

Isumi offered him a bag. "Doritos?"

---

Author's Note: Yang Hai is the guy who Isumi rooms with in China. There is one page where he talks about how computers are the future of Go, so in my fic I dragged him in to be the computer person.

Since Sai pretty much beat every Go player in part 1, I need to keep coming up with new ways to challenge him.

By the way, Yang Hai's program as described here would actually be better than any that exists in the real world, as the best computer programs are actually only at amateur dan level.

A bit of background about Go and computers is necessary here. Go is a much more challenging game for computers than chess because there are many more moves possible in Go than in chess and strategy is more qualitative. In chess, even the best professional players can be beaten by a computer. However, currently the very best Go program in the world is ranked 6 dan, while the top ranking for players is 9 dan (10 dan is a special title). Thus, a computer is far below the rank Sai would presumably be at. Even so, computers have been improving over the last ten years, and artificial intelligence experts believe they will one day create a program which is better at Go than humans. So some day we may have a famous showdown between Go players and computers akin to the Kasperov-Deep Blue showdown in chess.

It's kind of cool that computers can beat humans at chess but not at Go, isn't it?

Remember this, it will actually be plot-important later.

---

*To be continued.*

## Chapter 8

### **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Three: The Definition of Insanity is Repeating the Same Thing Over and Over Again and Expecting a Different Result**

---

The internet was an amazing invention, Mr. Amano from *Go Weekly* thought. Why, at one time just traveling to a Go tournament within your own country might take weeks. Today, an equal amount of time had allowed him to assemble an assortment of 20 players from 12 different countries all ranked seven dan or higher, into one video web conference.

Amazingly, finding Sai had taken even less time. This was also thanks to the Internet, where about a hundred people had posted analyses of Sai's online hours, and seventy of them agreed that Sai was most likely to be found online on weekends mid-afternoon. And an offer of a game with twenty professional players at once must have piqued Sai's interest, because he/she had accepted immediately.

The set-up was so that all twenty players would debate before each move, and then would vote on what move to play.

Mr. Amano wondered if anyone would even consider Sai defeated if he lost under such circumstances-a tag team of world players. But anyone who could crack Sai's mask even a millimeter would make headlines these days, and generating headlines was Mr. Amano's business.

Mr. Amano had failed to consider only one factor.

When twenty different people played a game as a team, every single move took much longer. Each player had to weigh in, debate, and then vote, and there was always one slow person per move. Not a

problem, right? He'd known in advance about that disadvantage. The game wasn't timed.

Except with that much time lag between moves, even the ever-patient Sai might begin to get bored.

Sai was actually a very kind player. Some who'd experience defeat at his hands would snort at the notion, but the truth was that Sai made an effort to coax weaker players to new heights of skill and usually tried not to win by too large of a margin. Sai wanted to enjoy his games, not crush his opponents-unless of course you made him angry. Or, apparently, bored. Around the third move of the game, Sai became *bored*.

---

The sound of some razzzy theme music jerked Hikaru back to awareness. He had become so caught up in watching the game that he'd forgotten about the anime episode playing in another window. It had been a while since that had last happened. "They almost had you there for a minute, didn't they, Sai?"

Sai covered a smirk with his fan. "Perhaps if they had elected one person to play in the end-game they would have stood a chance. The difficulties of fighting several playing styles at once delayed my victory. However, deciding by democracy brings out not the best moves of any player, but rather a skill level that is an average of the group assembled."

Hikaru exclaimed, "You call that average?"

Sai said, "From a group of the top world professionals, yes. Perhaps a little below average compared to the people I played as Honinbo Shusaku."

"Sai, when it comes to Go, you can be a bit of a bastard."

"I but desire to show my humble skills to their maximum capacity. And, of course, achieve the Hand of God. Raising the players around

me to new levels of talent is a necessary step in this goal, and one that requires not gentleness but the ruthless scissors of a bonsai tree master."

"Someday you could actually let someone last more than an hour against you."

"Maybe some day when they are not standing between me and watching the next episode of Yugioh Abridged."

Hikaru sighed, ruing the day he had introduced Sai to Yugioh. He had created a monster.

---

*Attempt Number 207 :*

"Hikaru, are you certain that this is a wise plan?"

"Of course I am! You want to play Touya Meijin, don't you? Especially after you had nothing but disappointing games yesterday."

"It is only that although I do not know much about computers, this plan of yours bears a strong resemblance to your last plan."

"It's *completely different* ."

That was also what Hikaru had said last time. However, it occurred to Sai that he really wanted to play Touya Meijin, so it was not in his best interests to be discouraging. Sure, Hikaru's new plan might be nothing but a leaf in a thunderstorm, but Sai had nothing to lose.

Hikaru called, "Mr. Touya? Could I ask you for a favor?"

Koyo Touya calmly looked up from his tea and Go book.

"Akira asked me to watch over his laptop. He's expecting an important message from someone. But I have to go to the-bathroom- so I need you to watch this for me."

Akira would express deep unhappiness, possibly in the form of lack of kisses and cutting off access to Mrs. Touya's baking, if he ever found out that Hikaru had let his father use his laptop without supervision. However, Hikaru knew this was for a deep and vitally important purpose.

Hikaru still remembered the day he had drawn Touya Meijin for his first professional game, and Sai had sat sadly in front of the board where Hikaru was supposed to sit, desperately wanting to play. For a second, Hikaru had considered letting Sai play the game, under a ridiculous handicap or something. But Hikaru had already played Akira's father multiple times while hanging out at Akira's house. (It was hard for anyone to be under Koyo Touya's roof for long without playing a Go game with him. Even people who didn't know how to play Go were forced to play him.)

Touya Meijin knew Hikaru's style too well to be fooled, no matter what tricks Sai used, so Hikaru had been forced to nix the idea. He'd had to play with Sai sobbing in his ear the whole time, and afterwards Akira's father had asked him if he was feeling well and suggested he see a doctor about the hearing problem.

After the game Hikaru had sworn a solemn oath to someday, somehow let Sai play Touya Meijin. This was no longer a favor, it was an obligation, for all the suffering Sai went through watching Hikaru play Akira's father repeatedly without ever letting him on the board.

And despite Koyo Touya's disinterest in Net Go, Hikaru was certain he would never be able to not play a game that was in front of him. He was kind of like Sai that way. If only Hikaru could get past Akira's father's notorious technophobia long enough to present him with a game.

Hikaru pulled up the Net Go webpage. "Here's what it will look like when someone sends the message. After that, you have to click on this message, okay? It's the one that says 'accept.' Oh, and if a Go board pops up then you just have to click on the place where you

want to put down stones." Hikaru smiled encouragingly. "Just sit there and wait for someone to send you an invitation-I mean message! I'll be right back!"

Koyo said, "You're opening the front door. The bathroom is on your right."

"Oh, but I have to go to a public restroom. I have girl problems." Hikaru waved as he skipped out the door. ("Girl problems" was the excuse that always got Akari out of the classroom no questions asked, and Hikaru was under the delusion that if it worked for her, it should work for him.)

Koyo sat alone in front of the computer. The screen had a picture of a Go board on the top, which drew his attention. However, there was incoherent text and odd words like 'HeartGo12' and "SaiFan1091" all over the place. Also, the sides kept flashing bright obnoxious pictures.

Some curiosity prompted Koyo to attempt to click on the picture of the Go board. He accidentally clicked on one of the other pictures instead.

A message popped up with a picture of a woman in a swimsuit. There was some other text and a box that said "accept." Was this Akira's important message? Very odd, he was going to have to talk to his son about this later.

Still, Koyo didn't want to be rude to this young lady he didn't even know, so he clicked on "accept."

The computer asked for an email address. Koyo typed in Akira's address. It disappeared, so he assumed his task was complete.

More boxes began to pop up on the screen. Some of them were accompanied by loud music. There was a picture of a TV, a dollar sign, and five more scantily clad women.

Koyo considered himself to be a modern father, so he tried not to judge his son too much. However, the music was very annoying. He started clicking on "accept" or roughly the equivalent, because that was what had made the last box go away. Sometimes the boxes wanted information so he gave it Akira's email; he was not sure what number his credit card was so he made numbers up.

Another message popped up, this one from something called McAfee Security Center. Koyo clicked on the pop-up to make it go away.

Several more messages from McAfee kept popping up, so Koyo kept clicking "allow" until they went away. Allow was similar to accept, wasn't it? This McAfee person was very persistent. He might be Scottish-Koyo had once been given a bear hug by an overly enthusiastic Scottish Go player. Some cultures did not understand the concept of personal space.

However, new screens continued to pop up faster than Koyo could accept them, and they were still noisy. How did one turn off the sound? Akira had showed him a button that looked like a triangle called mute but he couldn't remember where it was.

Koyo spotted a button that looked the same on the side of the laptop. He pressed it, but nothing happened.

He tried pulling instead. The button came off, along with a larger piece with lots of little holes in it, with a sharp "CRACK." The noise stopped.

This gave Koyo a chance to examine the boxes on the screen in more detail. He was no longer sure what message had been Akira's (on second thought, it had probably not been one of the undressed women) and he wished Hikaru had been more clear. Also, he'd forgotten how to close boxes. Was it the X, the square, or the minus sign?

Then one box caught his eye. It said "Free Go Boards." Koyo was not interested in computers, but this concerned Go. He clicked on it.

Koyo didn't have an email address, so he entered his son's. Akira wouldn't mind some free Go boards.

There was another box. This one was from someone in Nigeria who had a sick child. Koyo's heart ached with sympathy for this poor suffering woman. She needed some money, and surely he could spare some.

How did one put money in the computer? Koyo began to attempt to force a thousand-yen bill through one of the slots in the side. This didn't work, so he tried another slot. He must not have found the right one-modern vending machines were so confusing.

McAfee was sending him messages about having a virus. Koyo supposed that this McAfee person wanted money too. Except messages kept popping up-how many illness could the man have, and did he have to keep shouting about them?

The computer screen went black. Koyo frowned. He had a nagging suspicion that he had done something that was going to make his son upset again.

In an internet café one block away, Hikaru pounded at the table in frustration. He should have just taken the laptop upstairs, instead of deciding it was too risky to play in the same house.

He had a nagging suspicion that he might have done something that was going to make Akira angry at him again.

---

Author's Note: Most Go games last longer than an hour, so Sai keeping all his games to that length is actually manga-style unrealistically awesome. But exactly the kind of thing that Sai would do.

## Chapter 9

### **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Four: Friends Don't Let Friends Date Suspicious Characters, Even in Their Own Deluded Imagination**

---

Akira pointed his hand at his desk. "What is that?"

"A computer," Hikaru said dutifully.

"A computer which no longer works. I'm going to have to completely wipe my laptop and reinstall everything to get all the viruses off. And then I'm going to have to pay for someone to fix my broken speaker!"

Hikaru suggested, "I brought a headset jack that will let two people listen, so we can still watch movies."

"Do you think that solves the problem?" Akira demanded.

Hikaru sagged. "No. I'm very sorry about your computer. It was a bad plan and I'm an idiot."

"All you did was the exact same thing that didn't work last time! Hikaru, the definition of insanity is trying the same thing over and over again and expecting the results to be different."

Hikaru said weakly, "I thought you said that Ogata was showing him how to use computers."

"Ogata gets rid of all pop-ups before he lets my father touch the computer, directs him to the right website and starts a game, and stands next to him while he plays."

"But I can't be in the same room as him and play him as Sai at the same time."

"I've tried to play that role for you, Hikaru, but I just can't get my father interested in playing Net Go. He'd have to be hospitalized or in solitary confinement before he'd admit that playing Go through a computer might not be totally unnatural. Just give it up already."

"You say that I'm just repeating the same thing-but you don't like it when I get creative!"

"Hikaru, your idea of 'creative' involves trying to convince my Father that there is a World Go Championship online and the prize is a million US dollars."

"It would have worked on me," Hikaru complained.

"And then there was the yes-Go-pieces-and-hairspray-are-flammable incident which we agreed to never mention again."

"Which you mention once a month."

"So if, say, creative and stupid are interchangeable, then yes, I'd prefer you not get creative."

"Alright, I get it. No more plans that I don't run by you first."

Sai poked his head through the door. "Are you done fighting yet?"

"No," Akira said, at the same time Hikaru said, "Yes."

They looked at each other. Akira said, "I had one more point I wanted to bring up, actually. As I'm sure you know, yesterday Sai made a bad move and almost lost a game to a Belgian high-schooler."

Hikaru pointed at Sai, who was weeping on the floor and apologizing to the Hand of God for his brief infidelity to the game of Go. "Now look what you've done, you've set him off again. For the record, that time it wasn't my fault-Sai actually said the wrong square. Sure, I guess I might have noticed, but I don't find teaching games very interesting."

"My inbox was flooded with two thousand and seven messages from people around the world who wanted to know if I knew why Sai almost lost a game, if Sai was feeling well, if there was an imposter Sai, and if I wanted to make a statement to the media!"

"Okay, so now I know that I can't watch Yugioh while Sai plays because he finds it distracting. I'll stick to animes he doesn't care about."

"That's not the point, Hikaru."

"What is the point, then?"

Akira hesitated. He wasn't sure himself, except that he was angry at Hikaru and it wasn't just about having to cover for him in the Go world or another computer implosion.

When they were twelve, they had been best friends and Akira had known that Hikaru liked him and it was kind of exciting, but besides a few pecks on the lips that had been all. And now they were sixteen but their relationship hadn't changed, and that was a problem. Except Akira was the only one who seemed worried about this problem, so maybe Hikaru hadn't liked him that much after all, which was very angering since Hikaru had been the one to make Akira confused to begin with.

Akira said, "Basically, I want you to make this up to me."

"Let you play Sai?"

"I play Sai every week. I want us to go somewhere. I mean, somewhere better than where we normally go."

Akira looked oddly serious about this, so Hikaru gave it some serious thought. Where was the best place that Hikaru could think of? "Got it! Fuji-Q-Highland!"

"Fuji Q Highland?"

"It's an amusement park!"

"I did know that."

"Not just any amusement park, but the greatest in Tokyo that's not actually in Tokyo! It has a 4th dimension rollercoaster and the world's second largest haunted attraction!"

"Fourth dimension? What does that even mean, that it travels in time?"

"It means the cars don't just go back and forth on the track, they rotate around it! Look, I've wanted to go there forever. But it's expensive to buy tickets, and it also takes about two hours to get there from Tokyo so you need train tickets too. My parents won't buy amusement park tickets for me ever since this regrettable completely-not-my-fault incident at Tokyo Disneyland where Akari was almost beheaded."

"I don't think I've ever been to an amusement park before."

"Then you're going to love it! I'm pretty sure I have enough saved to buy my tickets, and you always have more money than me so you're set. Come on, please? It's going to be great!"

Akira couldn't help being swept along with Hikaru's enthusiasm.  
"Well, if you really think so..."

"I do! This is going to be the best date ever!"

Akira smiled back, resolving to look up rollercoaster accidents and specifically beheadings on the internet later.

---

As they walked to the train station, Sai commented, "Hikaru, I don't think you handled that very well."

"Handled what?" Hikaru asked.

"Exactly. Akira is justifiably upset with you, due to great personal inconvenience you have caused him."

"And I said that I would make it up to him."

"You invited Akira on a date to a place that you always wanted to go. Since you are supposed to be doing a favor for him, I am fairly sure that is a backwards way to do it."

"He said he wanted to go, didn't he? And he's going to love it! I've loved amusement parks ever since elementary school, which is the last time I went to one. Luckily Fuji Q Highland is a little outside of Tokyo so they haven't heard about the lifetime ban. I still don't understand why they didn't ban Akari, she was as much at fault as I was. Probably because she was a girl, and she was crying, and there was this *really* thin line of blood on her throat."

"Hikaru, I am trying to say that just because you want to go to the amusement park doesn't mean that Akira does."

"What would you know, Sai? You don't even know what an amusement park is!"

"I do know that Akira has helped us many times over the last two years, and I fear that we have not been as grateful as we could be."

Sai was very polite to Akira, and often thanked him for various things, so Hikaru suspected that "we" meant "you." And he was a tad irritated.

"Fine." Hikaru pulled out his cellphone and typed in: "Sai says I should say sorry because you've been doing a lot of work keeping my secret. No more attempts to make your father play Sai for a week, I promise."

Reading over Hikaru's shoulder, Sai squealed, "Hikaru, you can't do that!"

"What? You wanted me to do something Akira wants, right? He certainly made his feelings plain on that subject."

"But why do I have to be punished too!" Sai wailed.

"It was your idea..." Hikaru said innocently.

Normally a diversion tactic of that high level should have been more than enough to put off Sai, but the ghost was feeling persistent. "I was not done talking to you. I am concerned that Akira might feel neglected in your relationship."

Hikaru snorted. "As if you would know. Have you ever had a serious romantic relationship before, Sai?"

"Define 'serious.'"

"Someone more important to you than Go."

"That's not fair, Hikaru!"

"Can you think of anyone right now who you would be willing to date? Anyone at all?"

As Hikaru reached the entrance of the metro station and began to walk down, Sai ran through in his head the list of people whose existence he actually remembered (all of whom were talented Go players), weeding out those who were underage, elderly, married, seeing someone else, or extremely unattractive. In the end he really only had one name left. "Seiji Ogata?"

Hikaru fell straight down a flight of stairs.

Five minutes later, it was established that Hikaru was suffering from nothing but a bruised shinbone, and in his concern Sai had completely forgotten about everything from the previous conversation. Hikaru, however, hadn't.

Late at night, Hikaru tossed and turned in his bed, unable to sleep. Sai's innocent words kept ringing in his head. Seiji Ogata? Sai had a crush on Ogata?

And Ogata was already stalking Sai. What if it was mutual?

Hikaru sat bolt upright in his bed. "As God is my witness, this abomination will not come to pass!"

Hikaru was not in fact Christian, but he did have an extensive collection of American movies. He'd watched *Gone With the Wind* for the frilly dresses.

---

*Attempt Number 208:*

Luckily, Hikaru knew exactly how to distract Sai from Seiji Ogata.

Sai said, "Hikaru, I do not think that you ran this plan by Akira as you promised."

Hikaru rolled his eyes. "I can't run the plan by him because you made me promise not to try and set up a game with you and his father for a week."

"I did no such thing."

"And then you sat by my bed wailing for two nights until I gave in and said I didn't mean it."

"That, I did do," Sai admitted.

"And if I went to Akira, he would say that my plan is stupid."

"He would," Sai admitted again.

Given that Hikaru's plan consisted of a fake moustache, a top hat from his middle school magic kit, and an ill-fitted suit from his father's

closet, Sai was forced to agree with imaginary-Akira: this was a very stupid plan.

Gently, the ghost hinted, "Do you remember the Western ball gown and the blond wig? The monk clothes? The *hanfu* and the fake Chinese accent? The Easter bunny costume? None of those worked."

"Yes, well, that was because Akari didn't find me a good enough disguise."

Sai scolded, "Hikaru, Akari told you that none of those disguises would work!"

Hikaru waved a hand. "I know that. I always blame Akari for anything that goes wrong in my life. She always blames me with her friends and parents. We have a mutual arrangement."

Sai said, "If I might be as bold as to offer my own suggestion, I think you should consider that if we used some of the floating images, we could play Touya Meijin without ever showing your face."

"Sai, for the last time, Yugioh is just an anime, and there is no way to play Go with holographs!"

"Are you sure you're not just too cheap to buy them?" Sai said with uncharacteristic suspicion.

Hikaru sighed gustily. "Look, Sai, I may be cheap, but if there was a way to play Go with holographic monsters I would spend every bit of my money to buy it. I swear on my promise to one day let you play Touya Meijin. Satisfied?"

The ghost nodded reluctantly.

Hikaru put on a very deep voice. "I vant to play Go with oo. Do you think that sounds like a vaguely foreign accent?"

This would never work, Sai knew. But then, chance to play Touya Meijin-Sai never passed up on one of those. Hikaru couldn't say he hadn't been warned.

It took two tries before Hikaru could manage to make it understood through his mangled accent that he wanted to play a game of Go. Actually, Sai wasn't sure if Hikaru ever did manage to make himself understood, but when he set the board down, Koyo Touya started laying stones on it.

Alas, they were only about twenty moves in when Koyo commented, "Hikaru, would you pass me that stone I dropped? It's by your foot."

Hikaru went pale. "I'm not Hikaru. I don't know what you're talking about. I have to go now." He bolted for the door.

Leaving Koyo staring at the board mournfully.

Why Akira's friend seemed to play so much better when dressed in in funny costumes, Koyo did not know. He only wished they could complete a game someday.

---

To Sai's credit, he never said "I told you so" after one of Hikaru's plans went south. No, he just whined incessantly about having his game interrupted until Hikaru agreed to play some Net Go just to shut him up.

They had fled Akira's house, and Mikaru's sister wasn't working at the net café that afternoon, so Hikaru was forced to spend his own precious money to buy computer access. Sai had better appreciate this.

Sai did appreciate it-he was bouncing up and down like a small gravity-defying child. Hikaru smiled-Sai was irrepressible when it came to Go. The ghost was examining the list of names of players online like it was the menu of an ice cream shop.

Sai pointed at the screen. "Someone is inviting me to play!"

Hikaru said, "Twenty-something people are trying to get you to play, as usual."

"No, look, someone we know."

Hikaru read the screen name-SeijiOgataIsNumberOne. Yes, there was little doubt who that was.

Hikaru pressed reject with a vindictive snap. "Not a chance in hell, glasses."

Sai wailed, "Hikaru, my game!"

"You wanted to play him?"

"Yes! I recognize almost everyone else on this list. I've never gotten a chance to play Ogata before."

"He wouldn't be worth playing," Hikaru reassured him.

Sai frowned. "Hikaru, I do not understand why you dislike Ogata so much."

"Well, there is the whole Find Sai Task Force."

"Many Go players want to find Sai. Akira also once wanted to unmask Sai, before he understood your reasons for secrecy. Yet you do not hate any of them."

"Ogata's the only one who brought my friends into it. Besides, I don't see why you like him."

"Well, I don't really know him that well, but from what I have seen he is a talented Go player who genuinely loves the game."

"You're being deceived, Sai! He has ulterior motives!"

"I have never communicated with Ogata, so I don't see how he could deceive me."

"Exactly! You don't know him well enough!"

Sai paused, floating, but no explanation seemed forthcoming for what Hikaru seemed to consider a great argument.

Hikaru continued, "There have got to be better people."

Sai nodded. "There are certainly better players. If I had to choose, then I would prefer to play Touya Meijin."

Hikaru spit-taked. "Not Akira's father! Anyone but him!"

"Or Kuwabara-"

"Kuwabara! He's ancient!"

Sai cocked his head. "So am I."

Hikaru mimed retching. Sai watched in puzzlement.

"However, even if there are others who have more experience, I would still be happy to play Go with Ogata, as I would Kuwabara and Touya."

"Sai, that's just-wait, you're talking about Go, aren't you?"

"Yes, we were talking about Go," Sai said patiently.

Hikaru sighed. "Oh, Sai, you're so innocent. Don't worry, I'm not letting that deviant Ogata come near you. Look, that Dutch guy you like to play is logged in. Want to play him and the Chinese 4-dan at the same time?"

Sai was never completely sure how much of Hikaru's incomprehensible behavior was because Sai did not understand the

customs of the modern world, and how much was simply because Hikaru was incomprehensible.

Somewhere else, Ogata sat at his computer staring at the rejection notice, silently steaming in fury (and completely not having his feelings hurt or anything.)

So what was how they wanted to play, was it? Fine then. Ogata didn't need any friends. Operation Find Sai, second stage initiate.

---

Author's note: Yes, Sai's list of potential dates included both men and women. Rather than being heterosexual or homosexual, I see Sai as being more Go-sexual. When faced with an extremely attractive man and an extremely attractive woman, both madly in love with him, Sai would probably want to know who would win in a game of Go.

# Chapter 10

## Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Five: Evil Overlords Can Be Recognized By Their Uncanny Mind-Enslaving Hypnotic Powers And Their Stupid Glasses

---

There were a few place in life that Hikaru never wanted to be. Standing between Akari and a chocolate cream puff, for instance. Akari loved cream puffs and Hikaru had almost lost a finger once.\* Or being dropped out of an airplane without a parachute. (Hikaru sometimes had nightmares about that. So he was a little afraid of heights, what of it?) Bringing home a bad grade to his mother when she'd lost at poker night-normally his parents took his poor schoolwork in stride, but for some reason losing in poker always seemed to convince his mother that her son needed math skills. Another one was explaining to Sai why they had to stop playing Go in the middle of a game; Sai was more annoying than scary, but he wailed so loudly that he made the list.

But the number one place that Hikaru never wanted to be was stuck in an elevator alone with Seiji Ogata (aka creepy glasses guy.) He was seriously contemplating jumping out a window, except he was in an elevator so obviously there were no windows.

How had this happened? He had stayed a little late after his pro game because he was going over to Akira's house for dinner. Akira was late because he had an interview after his game; the media loved to snap photos of him and Hikaru couldn't blame them (he had a scrapbook of articles that Akira was never ever going to find out about.) Hikaru had an unusually long wait for the elevator and was contemplating the stairs when the door beeped open. Then they had stopped on the next floor down, and Ogata had gotten on before Hikaru could escape.

Huddled in the corner, Hikaru muttered under his breath, "He knew I would stay late because I always go over to Akira's house when his mother is making tempura. She makes great tempura. The reason why the elevator was so late must have been because he was pressing the button every time one came down, waiting for the one with me in it. And I'm sure he's thought to disable the emergency button. There's no escape."

Sai said, "Hikaru, I don't think Ogata is actually plotting against you. This fixation is getting unhealthy."

Ogata instantly proved Sai wrong by saying, "Hikaru, I was waiting to get you alone. We need to talk."

"About what?" Hikaru asked in the same voice as "Name, rank, and serial number."

"About Touya Meijin."

Hikaru wasn't expecting that. He barely stopped himself from saying, "Not Sai?"

Ogata continued, "Do you know how I finally got him to express an interest in Net Go? There's a player who currently lives in America who went to middle school with Koyo, who wanted to play him. He couldn't say no to an old friend. And then there were so many professionals from other countries who wanted a shot at the legend. But he still won't acknowledge anonymous players, I'm afraid. Maybe he's old-fashioned, maybe it's stubbornness, maybe he just can't respect what he sees as cowardice. Being unwilling to directly face an opponent."

Sai wailed, "I'm sorry! I want to play him directly! It's not my fault!"

Hikaru was used to ignoring Sai's outbursts by now, so he didn't react. He said, "You know, I'm pretty sure gloating and monologuing are no-nos on the evil overlord list."

"I will ignore that bit of banality as I often ignore your idiocy, Shindo. Instead I will skip straight to the point: the only person who is going to be able to convince Koyo Touya to play Sai online is me. And that's because I'm going to pretend that Sai is someone he knows. He'll realize the truth once he starts a game but he won't stop playing mid-match. Not if you manage to keep the game interesting, as I know Sai will. And feel free to try to steal my plan-you could never pull it off. You don't know Koyo well enough and you're a terrible liar."

"I am not," Hikaru said automatically.

"So, are you Sai's student?"

"Don't be stupid. I have no idea who Sai is."

"I rest my case."

Sai hinted, "I think he knows that you know who Sai is. I mean, who I is. Am."

Ogata said, "One offer for you, Shindo, or the game with Touya Meijin slips through your fingers forever. All I have to do is let one virus in, and his wife is banning him from the computer."

He paused, for drama. The bastard.

"Let me play Sai and I'll arrange the game with Touya Meijin."

"No way," Hikaru said.

Sai's wail of despair split his eardrums. Hikaru bent over double in nausea.

"That's a bit much of a reaction," Ogata said, amused.

"Let me up already," Hikaru groaned. "I get it, I get it. It's unpleasant but I know it has to be done. It was only a reflexive response, okay?" Hikaru straightened up and stopped talking to thin air. "Listen, I have

no idea who Sai is and we have no connection whatsoever. But if I did know who he or she was, then you would have a deal."

"Don't you need to ask Sai first?" Ogata asked.

"No, I think I'm certain on this one." Hikaru waved a finger at Ogata. "But let me tell you one thing. You are going to be a perfect gentleman during this game. No funny moves."

For the first time, Ogata looked sincerely perplexed. "No funny moves?"

Hikaru made a gesture towards his eyeballs and back at Ogata. "I'm. Watching. You. Got that?"

With that, Hikaru hopped off the elevator as it dinged open, and made a fast run for the exit.

---

\*This had been before Hikaru had learned to only tease Akari about things she didn't really care about, which would only get him exasperated but sweet-tempered scoldings. However, chocolate, her stupid sparkly shoes, and shoujo manga were all off limits unless he wanted to die the Death of a Thousand Cuts via hairpin.

---

Hikaru had only gotten a few steps before he heard footsteps running after him. He gulped and ran faster.

But his legs were too short (curse his parents' genetic material). He was barely out of the building when Ogata grabbed his arm.

Hikaru cowered. "Ifyoukillmeandhidethebodyyou  
'lnevergetagamewithSai!"

Ogata frowned. "Shindo, you forgot to tell me when we were going to play."

"Right. Well, that was no excuse for ruining my dramatic exit." Hikaru thought for a second. "Hey, what do you say we have the game with Touya Meijin first, save you for dessert?"

"You're a riot, Shindo, by which I mean that you should be tear-gassed and then beaten with a policeman's baton."

"Fine, no need to get upset. I'll log in tomorrow, Friday, at 4:00 or so. I won't accept any invitations except from SeijiOgata'sNumberOne. lame screen name, by the way."

Ogata glared. "What do you mean *you'll* log in? Shindo, do you think I'm stupid? I can tell your playing from Sai's, I assure you, and I won't offer again if you cheat me."

Hikaru froze like a rabbit in the headlights. "What did I say? I mean that I'll set up the game for Sai, that's all. Don't flip out. Besides, I don't know Sai and this is all hypothetical."

Ogata shook his head. "Shindo, how someone as dumb as you passed the professional exam will forever remain a mystery to me."

As he walked off, Hikaru mumbled. "That guy is completely an evil genius. Did you see the way he wormed that slip-up out of me?"

Sai said, "You shouldn't worry about it, Hikaru. When I was alive people used to tell me that they couldn't believe someone with no common sense could play a complex game like Go, and look where I ended up!"

---

*Friday, 5:51 PM, Japan Standard Time:*

Hikaru stared at the computer screen in shock and horror.

"Sai, I can't believe you let Seiji Ogata last *more than an hour* against you!"

"Hikaru, please tell him that was a very excellent game and I would like to play him some time. And tell him that he should challenge for another title soon."

"I mean, what about your reputation? Your mystique? And it's *Seiji Ogata* ."

"I am aware of who my opponent was, Hikaru. Now please type for me."

Hikaru typed into the chat window, "Your playing is slightly better than your looks, glasses boy."

" *Hikaru* ."

"Fine." Hikaru backspaced over the last message and wrote a grudging, "Good game."

"Now please find out when I can play Touya Meijin."

"It's good to see that despite this ridiculous infatuation of yours, your priorities aren't completely out of whack."

Hikaru typed in a rather pointed message about keeping promises, and stuck on a bit about how Ogata should in *no way* believe that Sai had taken longer to defeat him because he wasn't paying attention to the game. He hit send before Sai could figure out that this was sarcasm.

The response was, "Is that you, Shindo?"

Hikaru stared at the screen. "Damn. I knew he was an evil genius."

"Perhaps you were a little obvious. Which was unwise, given you want to hide your identity," Sai said. (Ogata was becoming a bad influence on him already!)

Hikaru typed in, "No habla nihonese."

The reply appeared quickly. "Cut the crap, Shindo. If Sai is an invalid as many believe, tell him I can recommend a better care provider. Now, I can arrange a game for you with Touya Meijin this Saturday at 6:00 AM. Accept the invitation from 'Koyo1415.' Is that acceptable?"

Hikaru made a face at the screen. "So early in the morning... he's probably doing this to get revenge on me by dragging me out of bed before sunrise. He knows I always oversleep. Evil!"

Sai suggested, "Perhaps if you accept the time, then Ogata will become convinced that you are not Shindo after all."

"Brilliant! You're a non-evil genius, Sai!" Hikaru quickly typed his reply.

Sai was getting good at this. He felt a little guilty, but then, this was his chance to play Touya Meijin.

---

It wasn't until Hikaru got home that he bothered to open his student planner to write down the date. Akari had brought him the planner after he'd missed a few too many meetings with her, and he was forced to grudgingly admit that it was very useful, when he remembered to use it.

When he looked at Saturday, his heart froze. There, with smiley faces all over the page, was "Meet Akira at Shinjuku train station to go to Fuji Q Highland!"

Hikaru had double-booked.

Whoops.

Hikaru could tell that Sai didn't realize. He didn't blame the ghost—he'd been waiting four years, maybe even a thousand years, to play Touya Meijin. Under such circumstances, he couldn't be expected to keep track of Hikaru's social life.

Hikaru knew that between the two, he would have to cancel the date. He saw Akira every day; Ogata's temperament was uncertain. Akira would give him another date; Ogata might not give him another game if he thought he'd been stood up-he already had what he wanted, Hikaru had nothing to bargain with. Sai would cry over Hikaru's bed every night if he missed his one shot at Touya Meijin. Akira himself would be furious if he found out that Hikaru had squandered this opportunity, because Akira knew how important this was to Sai.

But Akira would also know that it had been entirely Hikaru's fault for double-booking, seeing how he'd forgotten the date. Akira would also be less than pleased when he realized that the train and amusement park tickets were nonrefundable. Yes, Akira would understand, but he wouldn't be happy about it. Oh, and don't forget that Hikaru had promised separately both not to set up any games between Sai and Touya Meijin for at least a week, and promised permanently to run all plans for setting up a game by Akira first. Double whoops.

But there was a way-maybe-that he could make this work. There was no chance that Sai's game against Touya Meijin would last for under an hour. But Ogata had selected a time early in the morning, probably to spite Hikaru. And Hikaru had gotten tickets for a 10:00 AM train, because if he had to get up before noon on a weekend then he was at least going to sleep until noon on the train. So maybe, if luck was on his side, he would be able to make both.

He wouldn't rush Sai's game-wouldn't even tell Sai-but he could wait until the last moment to cancel.

And he didn't have to tell Akira anything unless it was obvious that he would miss the train. Sure, Akira would later find out Sai and his father had a game, but if Hikaru presented this as a fait accompli, Akira would be much less mad.

It was a plan. It was the kind of plan that Akari would tsk her tongue at, Akira would call stupid, and even Sai would gently suggest

unlikelihood of, but it was a plan.

---

Author's Note: The Evil Overlord List that Hikaru references is real.  
Google it!

# Chapter 11

## Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Six: There's a Good Reason No One Learns How To Play Go From Books on Tape, and It's Because Some Things In Life Should Not Be Multi-Tasked

---

*Saturday, 5:45 AM, Japan Standard Time:*

The other problem with the early morning time was that Hikaru's usual net café wasn't open. Luckily he had remembered to scope out an alternative in advance. He'd ended up in a small cubicle surrounded by guys in blankets, some asleep and some clicking fixedly, who looked like they'd been there all night. He resolved to save the receipt so he could present it to Ogata.

Sai was fluttering around the computer in rapid agitation. Hikaru hissed, "Stop that, you're distracting me."

Sai resumed place behind Hikaru's shoulder. "Sorry, I can't help myself. I just know something is going to go wrong. He's going to see through your disguise-"

"There is no disguise, this is the internet."

"We'll lose our internet part way through-"

"This is a 24 hour net café, if they let their internet go down they'd have to deal with hordes of crazy otaku and homeless people. Nothing short of an earthquake is going to make them lose power."

"An earthquake is going to hit Tokyo."

"Don't jinx us." Hikaru typed in the username and password.

"He's not there yet!"

"Stop panicking, Sai, we're fifteen minutes early." Hikaru glanced at his watch again, to make sure. "Do you want to watch something in the meantime? Or are you too keyed up?"

Sai began twisting his fingers into a knot around his fan. Hikaru took that as a response. He stifled a long yawn. "If I start to drift off to sleep, shout at me until I wake up."

"Hikaru, I don't think I have to tell you this, but please no wrong moves. Not for *this* game."

"I wouldn't do that to you, Sai. Look, I brought coffee and lots of candy bars to fortify myself with. It's a lucky thing I can sleep on the train."

"The train home? That's usually standing room only."

Hikaru started guiltily. "Never mind."

He took a look down to make sure he had his cellphone positioned on his knee. He already had written the message to Akira apologizing for canceling-all he would have to do was go to drafts and press send. He knew he might not have time to type in the heat of the game. He'd calculated exactly when Akira would have to leave his house to catch the train, and set an alarm on his watch. Unfortunately he was farther away from Shinjuku than Akira was, but at least that meant he had a longer window of time to alert Akira.

Now he just had to pray he wouldn't have to send the message.

Wishing for a distraction, Hikaru turned back to the screen. He fiddled around with Amazon Japan, his hands shaking with nervousness, or maybe that was the caffeine.

Sai was eerily silent. When Hikaru looked over his shoulder, he found the ghost standing upright, fan straight, his eyes fixed on nothing-his mind was already on the game.

---

*Saturday, 6:00 AM, Japan Standard Time:*

Ogata said, "I apologize for the early hours. Foreign time changes can be quite irritating." Inwardly, he really was sorry that his pettiness with Shindo might have inconvenienced other people as well.

Koyo said, "It is not a problem at all. I often rise this early. We should try not to disturb my son and wife, of course. I do not see Mr. Van Housen's name here?"

Ogata said, "I just got a text message from him saying he had to cancel. But there's someone else here who's been asking to play you as well." Ogata was capable of better lies, but at the moment he was feeling a little guilty. Koyo was so straight-forward that it was hard to justify lying to him, even if it was for the sake of Go. He'd been planning to pretend Sai was Mr. Van Housen and was now back-tracking. Ogata hit invitation quickly to derail further conversation.

When the game was accepted, a little tension went out of Ogata's shoulders. But when he handed Koyo back the mouse, his heart rate accelerated.

Hikaru had been afraid that Ogata would lie about setting up the game, to take revenge for past insults or because he could. But that thought had genuinely never crossed Ogata's mind. He wanted to see this game almost as badly as he'd wanted to play Sai himself.

And now he had front-row tickets. For once, Ogata wasn't being left out.

Not even the bribe of Sai's real identity could persuaded him to interfere with this game.

---

Sai said, "Play on 12-15."

Hikaru wanted to say, "That's an odd move. Why there?" But he couldn't possibly speak, couldn't break Sai's concentration. He'd learned basic Go manners by now, senior professionals (including Ogata) having drilled "silence during games" into his head.

There was no chance of Hikaru falling asleep. His veins were full of adrenaline, and his eyes were glued open.

His cell phone slipped off his knee, forgotten.

---

Koyo sat erect at the computer, precious seconds on his timer slipping away as he remained motionless. Finally, he spoke. "Who am I playing?"

Ogata smirked. "No one knows. They call him the Saint of Net Go. Some say that he is a ghost born up from among the wires. An unconscious manifestation of humanity's drive to find the Hand of God. I don't believe in melodrama, but I do believe that he is no one who has ever played a professional game. We would have noticed him. And yet what could keep such a great player from the highest games in the world? He must feel the pull, the drive fight the strongest, and yet still he avoids the spotlight. Perhaps he is unable to play in person. Perhaps he really is a ghost."

Koyo turned to the screen. "I will find the answer through the game, as I always have."

---

"2-17."

Hikaru clicked.

---

Koyo took a long sip of water. Ogata silently refilled his glass, without taking his eyes off the screen. His hands moved rapidly across a pad of paper as he recorded each move for later study.

Koyo was sweating a bit more than normal. Not that Ogata could blame him, with such an intense game.

---

A long wait trickled by after the last move. Hikaru played possible scenarios out in his mind. But no matter how he played the game, it always seemed to end in Sai's victory by half a point.

And if even *he* could see this, then the great Touya Meijin must realize too.

Sure enough, a message popped up on the screen. Touya Meijin had resigned.

---

When the game ended, a moment of silence reigned. But Hikaru had made one observation, one that he couldn't resist pointing out. "Sai, don't you think that Touya-sensei could have won if he'd just played differently *here* ? See?"

Sai gaped in astonishment. Somehow, both he and Touya Meijin had missed this. Hikaru was growing at an incredible rate.

*It's almost as if it was my purpose on Earth to show Hikaru this game,* Sai thought.

Hikaru screamed, "Oh god my cellphone it's under my chair! I'm late! We've got to run!"

---

If it had been Sai's role on Earth to show Hikaru this game, maybe it had been Touya Meijin's role to play this game, too.

"Touya-sensei?" Ogata asked with concern as Koyo Touya leaned over, gasping, clutching at his chest.

---

"We get to the station in fifteen minutes I can still make the train!"

"Train? Hikaru, your date was today! I forgot!"

"Don't worry about it, Sai! Just run!"

Sai, obviously, did not need to run, but he moved his legs as if he was running to show his moral support.

---

Akira appeared at the door, still in his sleeping clothes but with his toothbrush in his mouth. "Is something wrong? I thought I heard you shout."

Ogata lunged forward to catch Koyo as he fell. "Akira, call an ambulance!"

---

Hikaru leapt for the train doors as they began to close. With a mighty spring, he slid between the doors and crashed into the other end of the train.

Japanese people politely averted their eyes and moved a little away.

Hikaru rubbed the back of his head. "Ow. Is that train attendant who was chasing me gone yet?"

Sai scolded, "Hikaru, if you'd put more money on your card this wouldn't have happened."

Hikaru said, "I would have put the money on, I just didn't have time right now. And what were the odds that the train attendant would notice me hopping the gate? Normally they never pay attention."

People began to move further away from Hikaru as he continued to address thin air.

"But since I made this train, I'm going to make it to Shinjuku in time to catch the big train. Worth it." With great pleasure, Hikaru deleted his message to Akira from his cell phone. He thought for a moment,

then added a quick message that he might be running late so Akira should just get on without him and save their seats.

Hikaru began to bend and stretch his legs. "We're going to have to run for the next train. You ready, Sai?"

People backed further away from the crazy person.

---

Koyo Touya stilled. Ogata put a finger under his nose and realized he had stopped breathing.

Ogata felt his own lungs stop. He wracked his brains for memories of a very long ago class on CPR. That had been back in high school. But he'd been at the top of every class. He could do this.

He put his hands to Koyo's chest and began to press.

The ambulance sounded in the distance. Not close enough.

Akira stood by and watched. He'd never felt so helpless in his life.

---

Hikaru bowled over a small child in his flight, shouting "Sorry!" but not stopping. Sai hovered in the train doors as if he could stop them with his insubstantial body.

Hikaru tumbled straight through Sai on to the train. "S-s-see? I told you they always held for another five minutes after the so-called last call."

The train began to lurch forward. Sai observed, "Not any longer than five minutes."

Hikaru sagged against the wall. "I'm too sleepy to go look for Akira. Sai, go see if you can find him and tell him to come and get me. This seat here is nice and empty."

Sai opened his mouth to express that after all that running surely Hikaru could stay awake a little longer. But Hikaru was asleep before he got a syllable out. Feeling sympathy, the ghost supposed that he could go look for Akira, who was probably worried stiff.

---

Akira sat in the emergency waiting area, a coat thrown over his pajamas. It was cold and he couldn't stop shivering. He looked up as his mother returned.

Akiko Touya's face was white with fear. "They have your father in surgery right now. He had the heart attack while he was at the computer. He'd just finished a game with a net player called 'Sai.' The doctors asked if he was under stress, but it was just an online game, not even a real one, right? Why would a game with an amateur cause your father stress? The nurses, they won't meet my eyes when they talk to me. I know what that means, Akira!"

Akira could only slump in his seat, head down.

In his hand, his cell phone beeped. A messaged appeared on the screen. "*I've been sitting here an hour and a half, after a two hour train ride. All that fuss and you stood me up? You could have at least told me you were going to cancel. I hope you know I can't afford to buy tickets again, and yes that's because I spend my money too fast, but for all you accuse me of being selfish, you're a bit of a spoiled brat yourself. If you don't call me in the next ten minutes we're never going on another stupid date again.*"

Akira pressed his thumb over the off button and held until his phone went dark.

## Chapter 12

### Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Seven: Couples Who Get Divorced Should Never Ever Ask the Children Which Parent They Love The Most

---

Akira was walking towards the train station on his way to school when Hikaru accosted him.

"Akira! Why haven't you returned any of my calls or messages? I've been worried sick about you. Look, I heard about your father yesterday. I have to tell you that I'm really really really sorry."

Akira uttered a harsh laugh. "You always are."

Sai mouthed over Hikaru's head something about also being sorry, but the ghost didn't speak out loud, probably not wanting to interfere.

Hikaru attempted to give Akira a hug. Akira dodged.

For a second, Hikaru looked confused, but then his face smoothed over. "Right, I'll save it for when we're not in public."

Hikaru wasn't worried or scared. Hikaru didn't even seem to be considering the possibility that Akira might be angry with him. Hikaru never felt any doubts or hesitations or the slightest bit of concern about what anyone else might think. It was aggravating.

"How is your father doing?"

"He's still alive."

Hikaru looked like he'd been punched in the gut. And to his own astonishment, Akira felt *good* about that.

He continued, "They said that he had a heart attack brought on by, to quote, age and stress. Now what could have caused my father to be feeling stressed two days ago?"

With growing horror, Hikaru said, "Akira, you can't think that it was Sai's and my fault? Do you?"

"Oh, well, no more than all the chaos that goes on around you is ever your fault," Akira said.

"Akira..."

"You kept secrets from me, you put me at the bottom of your priorities list, and you lied to me, twice. But that's not the only reason why I'm angry-this goes much deeper than that. This is about every single stupid day where my life seems to revolve around you and your problems. I'm sick of it."

"Akira, if you weren't happy, you should have said something."

"Would you have listened? Because you never listen to me. I try to make an effort to take our relationship to the next level, and you forget the date. When I need you, you're not there. And guess what? No, I'm not happy."

Hikaru started to speak, and Akira shouted over him, "And do you know why? It's because you're a self-centered jerk! I do everything-teach you how to do stuff on the computer, help you with your homework, play Go with you, clean up after your crazy schemes-and you don't even seem to notice. What have you ever done for me? Forget it. We're done." He whirled around and walked away.

Hikaru said, "Once I cross-dressed, made a fool of myself in public, and gave away my biggest secret for you." But he spoke so quietly, that Sai was the only one to hear him.

---

After school, Akira went to the hospital to visit his father. He was still asleep, but Akira's mother was sitting by his bed reading a novel.

She closed her book when he came in. "Akira, good news. His surgery was a success. We're going to have to make a lot of changes-monitor his diet, schedule regular doctor visits, we should both take a class in CPR, and he's even been talking about possibly retiring professionally. But he's going to be just fine."

"I'm glad to hear that," Akira said softly.

"Your friend Hikaru has been here twice. He's the one who left that card with the bad joke. Visiting is still supposed to be family only, but he's over at our house so much that it was half the truth when I told the nurse he was a member of our household. He was almost crying when she said that your father was going to make a successful recovery."

Akira was tempted to tell his mother that Hikaru didn't have to receive any information about Father's condition. But that would just be petty. Plus Sai had probably been crying even harder, and Akira didn't want to hurt Sai. Despite what he might have said before, he knew that what had happened wasn't actually the ghost's fault. If this incident hadn't triggered Father's weak heart, then something else would have.

Akiko continued, "Your father woke up just an hour ago-and do you know what the first thing out of his mouth was? He wanted to tell me all about some game he'd been playing with an unknown amateur online. Honestly, that man, nothing but Go in his brain."

Akira said, "That game has already become a legend in the professional world. It front-paged *Go Weekly* and even made a tiny piece in a regular newspaper. Father lost by half a point."

"Really? Well, he's forgiven, then. I don't want to wake him up, but you should stay a little longer. Tell me about school, and the Hokuto Cup."

Akira froze. His mother shook her head. "Akira, you can't be thinking of missing the Cup because of your father, can you? You know he'd never want that."

"No, it's just-I'd completely forgotten about that."

"Forgotten, you? Akira, is something else wrong? Something you haven't told me?"

"No, of course not. I'll-I'll do my best to make you both proud."

---

Akira's big declaration about how he was "done" with Hikaru might have gone better if the competition for the Hokuto Cup team wasn't the next day. Difficult to never see someone again when you were about to enter intense training with them to compete as a team against young professionals from China and Korea in an international match. (Akira never doubted that Hikaru would make the team.)

Akira settled for not looking at Hikaru the whole day, and studiously not being engrossed by Hikaru's game with the wild-haired kid named Yashiro.

It wasn't fair that everyone kept crowding around Hikaru's game. It wasn't fair that Akira couldn't even peek without elbowing his way forward and making it obvious that he wanted to watch.

As expected, Hikaru made the team, which in turn meant that Akira was going to have to constantly spend time with him over the next few weeks. Again, not fair.

Kurata took the three players-himself, Hikaru, and Yashiro-aside to give them a lecture about training for the Cup. He set up a rigorous schedule of practice, and to make matters worse much of the practice was supposed to be at Akira's house (having cleared this with his parents in advance.) Akira's mother had probably thought

she was doing him a favor by arranging for company, and they did have a large place.

Then Kurata instructed them to schedule some practice games, and left to give his statement to Mr. Amano about Japan's prospects of winning the Hokuto Cup.

Hikaru had the nerve to look hopeful as he approached Akira. "So, what time this Saturday should we schedule the practice for?"

Akira deliberately turned to Yashiro. "I have this weekend free, but I think that we should start practicing earlier this week. Yashiro, could you ask the number two player if he is free on Thursday afternoon?"

Hikaru's face twisted with hurt. Akira felt a kind of guilty satisfaction.

---

"Yashiro, tell Hikaru that if he shows up late for the Hokuto Cup then we're letting Ochi play instead."

"Yashiro, tell Akira that some of us are occasionally late for a good reason."

"Yashiro, tell Hikaru that watching Yugioh Abridged for the third time is not a good reason."

"Yashiro, tell Akira that we might watch certain shows out of consideration for others in our household, and please imply that indulging the whims of self-centered people is time consuming, despite the many other things we might have wanted to do with our day."

"Yashiro, tell Hikaru that if his houseguest is selfish it's only because he picked up bad manners from his host."

Hikaru leapt to his feet. "You leave my ghost out of this! You can say what you want about me, but not about him! And you-I can't believe you actually brought *him* up in public!"

Akira was on his feet as well, "Yashiro, tell this buffoon that it's not my fault he can't keep his mouth shut! I didn't say anything about *him*, you did!"

The rest of the train was trying to politely ignore this display. Yashiro contemplated going over to the other side of the car so he could pretend to have nothing to do with these two. It wouldn't be hard- they weren't looking at him.

A white-haired, foggy-eyed old lady patted Yashiro on the arm. "It's always hard to get stuck between a married couple, isn't it? Don't worry, just let them be and they'll likely sort it out. You have to really love each other to shout like that in public, yes?"

Hikaru and Akira were shouting too loudly for Yashiro to reply.

---

For some reason, Yashiro kept making excuses to leave practice early. (He was a very jumpy person too, Akira couldn't help noticing.) Unfortunately, this often left Akira and Hikaru without a buffer between them. Sai did not count, because he refused to repeat Hikaru or Akira's words back to them, and was prone to wailing when this was even suggested.

When he couldn't address Hikaru through someone else, Akira at least made a point to not look at his face, and finished his remarks with something snarky. As he cleared the board, he said, "Your end game has improved, but you still need to stop rushing when you think you have the advantage. By the way, a fake moustache under my bed says that you made another attempt to play my father in disguise that you didn't tell me about. I don't see why I'm surprised, since you were lying to me since the first time we met."

"I don't see why you only blame me! Sai was just as guilty of deceiving you."

"Blaming your mistakes on Sai. That's like telling your parents you shouldn't be punished for eating all the cookies because your two-

year-old brother suggested it."

Hikaru looked ashamed. "I admit that was out of line."

Sai wondered if it was possible he should be insulted here.

Akira continued, "I'm not really in the mood for another game. Sai, do you want me to log in under your name and play a few games online? Your adoring public desperately wants to see you again. Give me a little more time and I'll set up another game with my father."

Hikaru gaped and made surprised noises.

Akira said, "What? Just because I'm angry at you doesn't mean I'm not still friends with Sai."

Hikaru protested, "But Sai is my ghost!"

Akira said, "Maybe he'd rather live with me. I'd be happy to let him play online at least once a day. And all the most famous professionals in Japan and around the world come to visit my house."

"You can't do that!" Hikaru screamed. "Sai, tell Akira that you like me better."

Sai began to back away uneasily. "I would kindly appreciate if you two would leave me out of this."

Akira's mother called, "Akira, there's some news posted on the *Go Weekly* reporter's blog that I think you should look at. Oh, and please try to keep the noise level down, okay?"

Chastised, Akira turned to his computer to look, studiously avoiding Hikaru's eyes.

He found Mr. Amano's blog, and a set of informal comments on his opinions of the interview with the Korean players. There was

something about Honinbo Shusaku being outdated and overrated?

Hikaru popped over to look at the sound of Akira's surprised gasp.

"He said *what* about Sai? That bastard! I'm going to show him what for at the match."

Akira didn't want to agree with Hikaru, but couldn't disagree on this point. So he said, "Sai, I'm sorry about that. I hope you realize he is going to eat those words."

Hikaru demanded, "Why are *you* angry about this?"

Akira said, "I have just as much right to defend Sai's honor as you do."

"You mean at the Cup?"

"Yes. I'm going to play Ko Yeong-ha. It's the logical choice: I can beat him, you can't."

"You're just doing this to spite me!"

"And you really think you can win? Really? You're not just being *selfish* ?"

Hikaru faltered.

Akira drove the knife home. "Not everything is about you, Hikaru. Maybe I happen to want the captain's game with Ko Yeong-ha. It's rightfully mine since-your unfulfilled boasts aside-I'm still the stronger player. Maybe this time I don't feel like giving anything of mine up for you." Akira added, "You don't mind me being the one to avenge you, do you, Sai?"

"Sai, tell Akira what jerk he's being! You don't like him when he's like this either, do you?"

Sai wondered if this was what children with divorced parents felt like.

With both Hikaru and Akira going through so much pain, there was no way the poor ghost could mention how ever since his game with Touya Meijin he kept feeling like his body was fading away...

---

Author's note: I am so close to breaking 100 reviews. Everyone, please help me make it!

## Chapter 13

### **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Eight: Comfort Food Is Mandatory When You're Feeling Poorly, But You May Regret Overeating Melon Bread When Delivered Two Shocking Revelations In One Day**

---

Kurata looked up at Hikaru from where he was sitting. "I've already settled on Akira as the team captain."

Hikaru said passionately, "He should at least play me and Yashiro for the first game!"

Akira said snidely, "Sure, as if that would make a difference. How often to you beat me? Once every ten games or so?"

Hikaru snapped, "You can't know that you'd win! And I have a strategy for that Korean bastard that I want Kurata to see!"

"You don't think I would win? Let's see about that." Akira began to frantically clear the board in front of him for a new game. Hikaru joined him, with both of them knocking stones on to the floor in their haste and accusing each other of creating a mess.

Kurata said, "I was going to say that Akira is first slot and that's final, but if you want to play anyway, be my guest."

Yashiro raised his hands to indicate that he was in no way getting involved.

For the first two games, Akira crushed Hikaru mercilessly. His rough playing caught up with him and in the third game he made a poor move. Hikaru leapt on the weakness and dragged out the game, finally drawing out a narrow victory.

With each game of Go lasting a couple hours, this was a long and tedious process. Kurata said pointedly, "Akira, Hikaru, I think we all want to go home now."

"I'm not done yet! I can beat him next time!" Akira exclaimed. He began to reset the timers for a game that would last at most half an hour-a speed game by Go standards.

Kurata and Yashiro exchanged glances. Then they left together, leaving the two still playing.

Kurata returned much later in the evening... and was astonished to see the two still playing. As they kept putting down stones, too engrossed to notice him, he perused the paper records lying next to them.

Akira still had a winning record. But Kurata couldn't deny that something about Hikaru's incredible improvement across the course of these games made him think that maybe the boy was on to something. Putting Hikaru in the first game would be an interesting strategy-it might confuse their opponents. And if they underestimated Hikaru, he might have a real chance. Akira could be counted on to win the second game, or just about any game, but they needed two victories to win as a team.

Kurata cleared his throat, and again until they noticed him. "I think Akira is still first for the Chinese game-but I would consider the first seat for the Korean game to be still in the air."

Hikaru made an exclamation of triumph. Akira protested, "The only reason Hikaru can beat me even occasionally is because of all the training I gave him!"

A thought occurred to the older professional. Kurata had been at the dinner at Akira's house where the boy had accidentally made Sai famous, and like all the players who had been defeated then, one nagging secret had been bothering him ever since.

Kurata said slyly, "How about we say that Hikaru gets first seat... unless Akira is finally willing to spill the juicy details on Sai's real identity?"

A dark look passed over Akira's face, and Hikaru could see that he was tempted. But he only scowled and stomped out of the room.

For the very first time, the full seriousness of his fight with Akira dawned on Hikaru. Akira would never tell, Hikaru knew that. But the Akira of just a week ago wouldn't have had that look on his face, as if he might be considering telling, for even half a second.

The heavy feeling in Hikaru's stomach might have had some guilt, and some anger. But it was mostly fear.

Fear of losing Akira.

---

Yang Hai had been working frantically at his computer for the last three days. His goal? To teach his artificial intelligence program Deep Orange every aspect of Touya Meijin's game against the Saint of Net Go, Sai. He really felt that this could be his breakthrough. Was this how earlier programmers had felt when they'd first began to topple the greatest human chess players? Yang Hai liked to think so.

Why would this game be any different from others? Well, besides the amazing skill and strategy in the game that players all over the world had been busy analyzing, Yang Hai had stumbled on one other remarkable observation. A Japanese professional named Morishita had posted a comment on the game from a member of his study group, Hikaru Shindo.

Shindo had identified the one move in the game where Touya Meijin could have been victorious.

As a result, Yang could finally simulate a game that ended in Sai's defeat. This was a breakthrough of epic proportions. He couldn't wait

to test the new version against Sai-they'd see who would last twenty minutes this time!

His friend/long-suffering assistant Bao called, "Yang, can I come in? We have guests."

Yang swiveled around. "Yes, of course."

He was shocked to see the school president enter the room, along with an older Chinese man that he didn't recognize, a scrawny man with a long nose and thin glasses.

"Sir! This place is a mess, I'm sorry."

"No need to get up," the president said. Yang wondered why he looked so nervous-was the other man someone that important?

The stranger said, "Your president forwarded a rather interesting report from you, along with a Go computer program."

Yang couldn't resist talking about his favorite subject, "Yes, we've made a huge breakthrough after this last game. The program I sent you last night is the finished product, and I just finished confirming there aren't any bugs in it either. I'm finally ready to test it-we've been playing Net Go, but if we can manage to beat professional players online, then I'm hoping we'll be able to arrange a demonstration match with real players, like the famous Kasparov-Deep Blue chess match."

The stranger cut him off, "Yes, we've already done that. Your program was been confirmed to beat the top Chinese Go players, and we tested against some internationals as well. We are quite satisfied."

"You are? With what?" Yang asked. "No, I mean why are you interested in this? Who are you?"

"As you might not realize, young Yang, the upcoming Go match of young professionals from around the Pacific, the Hokuto Cup, has taken on some political importance. It is a clear chance for various countries to demonstrate superiority."

"This is just a children's project," the president protested weakly.

"I happen to think otherwise, and with my father's connections that is enough. We already have a copy of the program, but we are now confiscating this machine and all other copies you may have." He waved in some men, who began searching Yang Hai's room without asking for permission. One of them unplugged the computer and picked it up, rudely tearing off the cartoon of an orange with sun glasses that Le Ping had drawn and stuck on the side.

"As compensation for this, we will pay for all your school fees, and an additional 500,000 yuan."

Yang pleaded, "There is other work on my computer... I have a paper I'm writing! Can I at least copy some files?"

"Your president will ensure you get top grades in all your classes, so you should have no further concern about your schoolwork. I strongly advise that you not speak to this to anyone. Good day."

When they were alone, Bao said, "At least we were compensated for all the time we spent on this. My mother will be happy about the money."

Yang Hai could only sob, "My precious Deep Orange... what are they going to do with you?"

---

There was no melon bread left in Hikaru's house. All of his convenience store breads, which were supposed to last him a week, were eaten. Hikaru had consumed the last five this afternoon, and he still didn't feel better about the look on Akira's face when Kurata had confirmed Hikaru as top player for the Korean game. It almost made

Hikaru want to say never mind, he didn't need the game after all, but he'd tried so hard to get it, and there was Sai to think of too.

The solution, obviously, was to get more melon bread.

Hikaru muttered to himself (and Sai) as he browsed the bread section of the convenience store. "That Akira... I don't understand him! I keep wanting to say I'm sorry, but then he makes me so angry and I start thinking that I shouldn't have to apologize. I hate this, Sai. I just want everything to go back to the way it used to be."

Sai nodded. Honestly, he felt the same way. "Hikaru, there's another thing I need to talk to you about."

"Is it important?"

"Well, yes. After my game with Touya Meijin-"

"I don't really have the time to set up another game for you, Sai. Can't you see I have a bigger crisis on my hands? I happen to-what the-"

Hikaru had rounded the corner to spot Seiji Ogata in the next aisle, examining boxed lunches. "Gah! We have to get out of here!" He began to back away, moving towards the store's exit.

Sai said, "No we don't, he's just shopping, Hikaru. I really do need to talk to you..."

"Is this about Ogata?" Hikaru asked suspiciously.

"Not really, no."

"Because I hate to be the one to tell you this, but even if you were still alive it would never work out. He's too-did you say no?"

"I said no," Sai confirmed. "Hikaru, ever since the game with Touya Meijin I've been feeling-wait, did the box-that-is-called-TV say something about Go?"

Sai's instincts were never wrong where Go was concerned. Sure enough, the announcer was babbling something about "Go" and "human interest."

An Asian man appeared on the screen. Thin glasses perched over a long nose. "My name is Professor Wen. I have an announcement to make. As many of you may not know, recently an Internet Go player has established dominance over every major professional in the world of Go. I am here to announce the identity of this player."

Hikaru's heart stopped. When had he gotten involved with the Chinese? Had someone bugged his house? Was Ogata behind this?

"The matches were played by a computer program known as SAI: Synthesized Artificial Intelligence. This program was created by Chinese experts in computers and Go. We will offer proof of our claim through public demonstration matches in-"

Hikaru had stopped listening. His relief at not having his name announced was predominant-but he didn't know what to make of this. People had made outrageous claims about Sai before, but this one had been on television, not even a special show on Go but *regular* television.

Behind him, Ogata said, "Not what you were expecting, was it?"

"Eep," Hikaru said.

Ogata continued, "Plenty of people will be skeptical of that claim, I'm sure. And there hasn't been a computer program yet which could play Go on the professional level. Unlike chess, Go is too complex to be played by mindlessly running through every possible move. To create a computer that could strategize would require true artificial intelligence."

"I wouldn't know anything about it," Hikaru said faintly.

Ogata said, "I'm asking you to pass the message on. Someone shouldn't be threatened by this, although if he does chose to reveal himself he would be welcome."

"That guy terrifies me more with every passing encounter," Hikaru commented as Ogata walked away. "And the guy on television had glasses too. What is it with evil and glasses, Sai? Sai!"

Hikaru was horrified to see that Sai was disappearing around a corner, waving his hands as if he was being dragged away. His mouth moved but no sound came out.

Hikaru took after him in a run. As he rounded the corner, he saw Sai continue to drift away.

He tried to grab the ghost's hand, but needless to say his grasp went straight through. Sai was trying to mouth something but Hikaru was terrible at reading lips.

At other end of the aisle was a young Japanese woman, heavily pregnant, adding a box of cereal to her shopping basket. Standing behind her was Ogata.

Struggling frantically, Sai impacted with the woman. Needless to say, there was no real impact; the woman didn't even notice. But something very odd happened-Sai didn't tumble through her. He remained stuck. He kept trying to frantically jerk away, but his body was growing thinner.

A very horrible suspicion occurred to Hikaru. He wasn't sure if he was right-but the fact remained that Sai was disappearing, and this woman was causing him to disappear. The connection between her and Sai had to be disrupted somehow. Hikaru was too far away to reach her in time.

Hikaru shouted, "Lady, move! Get out here!" She seemed to have headsets in her ears, up to maximum volume since she didn't even look up. "Someone pull her away from that spot!"

Seiji Ogata poked his head around the woman, giving him a questioning look.

"You have five seconds to move her away from that spot or no one will ever hear from Sai again!" Hikaru screamed.

Without hesitation, Seiji Ogata tackled a pregnant woman.

---

Hikaru ran from the store as fast as he could move, pausing only to urge Sai on. It wasn't until he was three blocks away that he was able to heave a sigh of relief and collapse to the sidewalk.\*

"What happened back there?" he demanded.

Sai said, "I can only speculate on the same information as you. But I do have to ask, what are your beliefs on reincarnation?"

Hikaru said, "I think I'm more open-minded on the subject than I used to be. Because that definitely looked to me like you were about to be forcibly reincarnated."

"I have been trying as hard as I could to stay in this world, even after it became obvious that my presence was fading away. But it seems I have an ultimatum: even if I stay here, it will no longer be as a ghost."

"You're disappearing? Why didn't you say something before?"

"I tried," Sai said.

"I'm sorry."

"I would have tried to tell you sooner, but I didn't want to worry you. And at first I was able to resist. But I think that after the last game with Touya Meijin, my time finally ran out. I should be grateful, I suppose, that this might mean a second chance at life, even if that is

not what I want right now. And now this fake me-if I disappear I will never be able to clear my name."

"I'll stay far, far away from pregnant people, or anyone who looks like they might be either fat or pregnant," Hikaru promised.

Sai said gravely, "Thank you, I appreciate it. But although I don't want to go-I don't think I have a choice. We can delay this, but we can't stop it."

Hikaru's face crumpled and Sai seriously thought he might be about to cry.

---

\*Sure, he'd left Ogata behind to be dragged off by the police, but it was only Ogata.

---

Author's Note: Thanks to everyone who helped me make my goal of a hundred reviews! You guys are awesome!

This chapter wasn't as funny as usual (despite a mild helping of crack), but is necessary to set the stage for the climax of the story. Don't worry, it will be a funny climax! Also, I will be taking some liberties with how the Hokuto Cup is set up, for the sake of the plot. Events have already gone very differently from the original storyline, so it shouldn't be surprising.

Reference my previous note at the end of Chapter 7 on computers and how they can't play Go, or look it up on Wikipedia. But basically, there has never before been a show-down between the top world Go players and a computer before, because computers aren't on the level to challenge yet. But there is every expectation that someday this will happen, as it did with chess.

Don't worry about Ogata, he got off with a warning.

## Chapter 14

### **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Nine: Computers Should Not Be Playing Go Unless They Can Do Holographs Like On Yugioh, Which Would Be Awesome**

---

Akira was rather upset that he had to be the one to mention the fake Sai to Hikaru. He was burning with curiosity to know what Sai thought about this, and he couldn't manage to get Hikaru alone so he could talk to Sai directly-Yashiro and Kurata were always around. Hikaru had ignored his attempts to find an excuse to leave the room together. Akira wanted to be insulted, but-Hikaru looked miserable. He was barely even paying attention to his games. He certainly wasn't gloating over first seat for the Korean game.

Finally, Akira's impatience won over his pride and he loudly opened the subject himself.

"What do you think of the announcement about Sai?" he addressed to Yashiro and Kurata. "Do you believe it?"

Kurata ran a hand over his chin. "I didn't at first. But they've been putting on some pretty convincing demonstrations. Professor Wen has traveled to China, Korea, America, and a few European countries and has beaten every single player. I didn't think anyone but Sai could do that."

"But there's still reason to be suspicious," Akira noted. "For starters, no one has explained why the player Sai appeared on the Net as a Japanese player, when this computer was created in China. His location could have been falsified but why would anyone bother? Also, the original 'Sai' always played games online but the professor hasn't played a single game on the Net. He only accepts in-person challenges. It's almost like he wants to avoid being challenged by the real Sai online, isn't it?"

Yashiro said, "But everyone is talking about how Sai hasn't played a game online since the Touya Meijin match."

Hikaru muttered, "I've been busy... and I don't have any money left to afford a net café."

Akira resisted the urge to smack Hikaru across the back of his head. Covering up for Hikaru's blunders was officially no longer Akira's problem.

Behind Hikaru, Sai was declaring, "You mean to say everyone actually thinks this machine is me? This is an outrage, Hikaru! I must have an opportunity to defend myself."

Hikaru said, "The truth is, I sort of thought the machine would lose a few times and then vanish as a fake."

"That's what everyone thought," Kurata said. "Up until this point no one has been able to create a computer program that could play Go at the unbeatable level. There have been programs that could beat all the amateurs, yes, like that silly Deep Orange, but up until now humans have always been the best Go players. We were rather proud of that, actually."

Yashiro said, "It's a bit of a letdown, isn't it? Everyone was so excited about Sai revitalizing the Go world. There were more students joining the insei and even my father made a comment about how Go was appearing more in the news. But now people find it's a computer no one will be very interested anymore. A computer, well-it's cheating."

Sai buried his face in his hands. Hikaru looked stricken as well.

Akira said, "I've been analyzing the computer's matches, and its style is very similar to Sai's. If it's not Sai then it's *deliberately copying* his past games. Professor Wen is coming to Japan in three days, supposedly to lay to rest any rumors that he's been avoiding the place previously believed to be Sai's home country. My father wants

to play the computer, but the doctors told him he has to wait another week before he's allowed to do anything 'stressful' and because his heart attack was during a Go game, my mother is laying down the law."

"You said 'the computer.' Don't you mean that your father wants to play Sai again?" Yashiro asked.

Deliberately addressing the space in the air where Sai was, Akira said, "I meant it the way I phrased it. My father doesn't believe that Sai is a computer. And for the record, neither do I."

Kurata said, "I don't want to believe it, but-the evidence is more convincing with each loss. At this point, Sai or not I don't know if we can say that humans are the best Go players anymore."

Looking angry, Hikaru said, "Perhaps during this visit we'll see the real Sai beat the computer. I'd like to watch that."

Honestly, did Hikaru live under a rock? Akira sighed and delivered the cold hard facts. "First of all, Hikaru, the matches have to be played in person. Second of all, most of the demonstration matches are given to professionals by invitation only. Professor Wen created one 'open challenge' time after people accused him of trying to avoid Sai by only playing known professionals. But it was scheduled for the same time as the Hokuto Cup. And by the way, it would embarrass Japan on an international stage if one of their players didn't show up at the Cup. So no, you aren't going to be able to make it-you have a prior appointment."

Kurata said, "Everyone knows that Professor Wen scheduled the time on purpose, in order to attract attention away from the Hokuto Cup. He said on TV that we'd see which event attracted more reporters. It's like he's mocking us."

Feeling bad about how glum Sai looked, Akira added, "I'm sorry. Some of the professional players keep putting pressure on Wen to accept online challenges."

Yashiro said, "You know, if his program isn't Sai, Professor Wen is never going to let it play online. He wouldn't risk meeting the real thing."

Kurata said, "At this rate, he doesn't need to in order to ruin Sai's reputation."

There was nothing anyone could say to that.

---

Alone in his room, Hikaru flopped onto his bed and stared at the ceiling. Finally, he said, "Sai, I don't know how I'm going to fix this. I'm sorry. This is much worse than what that Korean guy said about you, isn't it?"

The ghost covered his face with a fan. "This is the second time in my existence that my name has been tarnished with the label of a cheater. I begin to wonder if it is a fate that I must bear."

Angrily, Hikaru put a fist into the covers. "It isn't. They're the cheaters, not you."

"And now I'm going to disappear before we even have the opportunity to clear my name."

"Don't say that."

"This feels like my punishment for doing something wrong in my life," Sai opined.

Hikaru said, "It's all because someone taught a computer how to play Go so they could cheat their way to victory."

Surprisingly, Sai said, "I don't have any objection to people teaching these metal boxes to play. It takes a greater grasp of strategy to teach another, especially a machine with no mind of its own. In attempting to put the entirety of Go in a metal box, the creator must obtain a deeper understanding of the game. The ideal of such

teachers is to discover every possible move in Go that could ever exist and create a being that cannot be beaten in Go-that is what the Hand of God is."

"The Hand of God? But something like that should be done by a person, not a computer."

"If it is built by humans, then humans are the ones chasing after the Hand of God. It is the human behind the machine who triumphs, in having created the unbeatable game." Sai smiled sadly. "And in that sense, the Hand of God is the end of Go. I always knew that. Once the perfect game is found, what point is there to playing? I have longed for and feared that day."

"Sai... weren't you angry at the computer pretending to be you? And now you're fine with it?"

"I hate the fact that the man behind that machine stole my name. I don't mind those Chinese children who announced themselves honestly and fought me with their machine in a fair duel. But this man lies and steals other's hard work. And I hate the fact that people see me as a cheater now-they think I am a human who used a machine to play for him while taking all the credit himself, who pretended to fight his opponents on equal terms while using a tool to an unfair advantage. I have played all my games with honor. I have evolved and learned from my opponents, and I am not yet a perfect player-they all had a chance to beat me. Yet from these games both players progressed. And now someone tells me that none of my games counted. That I do not exist as a person at all. And how can I argue? I have no mouth to speak, no hands to play on my own. I might as well not exist."

Hikaru sat motionless for a long moment. Then he said, "You're wrong, Sai. You do exist. You can have my body, and my name too, if that is what it takes. I'll let you play him at any price. And we're going to beat that fake Sai."

---

For the second time, Hikaru had double-booked.

The Hokuto Cup was supposed to start at 9:00 AM in the morning. The open matches wherein the Synthesized Artificial Intelligence would accept challengers from any player was to also start at 9:00 AM. The Hokuto Cup ended when all matches were complete, which was expected to be around 8:00 PM. Then there would be an hour-long closing ceremony.

The open matches against the Synthesized Artificial Intelligence ended at 9:00 PM, the same time as the Cup, but theoretically if someone skipped the ceremony they could make it in time. The problem was that traveling between locations would take another forty to fifty minutes. It wasn't happening-not unless the matches took much less time than was expected.

---

Ko Yeong-ha was extremely surprised to find that his opponent was Hikaru Shindo, not Akira Touya as he (and everyone else) had expected. Was he to take this to mean that Hikaru had hidden talents, or was the Japanese team just a bunch of idiots?

Either way, all he had to do was play his best. He clicked his timer and began his game.

The first few moves were routine and took neither of them any time at all. It wasn't until the first groups began to form that Yeong-ha began to linger more than a few seconds over his moves.

He took ten seconds to move.

Hikaru took five seconds.

He took six seconds to move.

Hikaru took three.

He took thirty seconds to move.

Hikaru took fifteen.

Yeong-ha didn't normally pay much attention to his opponent's speed, but he was starting to notice something unusual. Hikaru was taking much less time to play than he was.

Yeong-ha lingered a full minute over his next move. He watched Hikaru's face twist with nervousness. When he finally played, Hikaru slapped down his next piece so quickly the timer was barely able to register any change.

Yeong-ha felt a rising tide of anger. It was almost as if this Japanese player was trying to beat him while playing *Speed Go* . Exactly how lightly was he being taken?

He'd let the misunderstanding over his comment about Honinbo Shusaku stand because he'd wanted an opponent who would become passionate about the game. Instead, he was left with someone who barely seemed to care about their game at all.

Deliberately, Yeong-ha began to restrain himself a few extra seconds before each move he made. He was not usually a player who had any problem with time so he was not afraid to use his allotment liberally. Hikaru Shindo responded by playing even faster. Ko Yeong-ha's indignation rose, and he played more aggressively, now seeking to crush his opponent quickly as well. That was all he deserved.

But despite his insanely fast moves, Hikaru didn't *look* like he wasn't taking the game seriously. His spine was rigid, sweat dripped from his face, and he'd barely blinked for the whole game. He played as if he truly wanted to beat Yeong-Ha with all his heart, and he simply had only half the time on his clock to do so.

Hikaru placed a piece down and Yeong-Ha realized that a large number of his stones had been captured. When had he made such a mistake? Had he been playing so angrily that he'd lost track of the flow of the game?

He focused all his energy on defense-but it was too late. Finally, he said, "Pass."

"Pass," Hikaru replied.

The room was quiet. If they hadn't known what to make of Hikaru Shindo playing the number one Korean player Ko Yeong-Ha instead of Akira Touya-then they knew even less what to make of Hikaru Shindo winning by half a point.

Hikaru finally looked up from the board and met Yeong-Ha's eyes squarely. "That was an amazing game, thank you. And Honinbo Shusaku is awesome."

Then he ran for the door like he was being chased by a horde of hungry lions.

---

"Wait, stop!" Kurata shouted as Hikaru ran. Puzzled, he turned back to the rest of the Japanese team. "Maybe he had to go to the toilet."

Akira muttered, "There's no way... he couldn't be that stupid. What am I thinking? Of course he's that stupid. Idiot, idiot!" Then Akira took off in a run as well, leaving Kurata standing alone, astonished.

But something was clearly up, something he didn't want to miss out on. Kurata turned to Yashiro. "Would you mind accepting victory on behalf of the Japanese team by yourself? Here's my speech, you can use that if you want."

With that, Kurata ran out the door, leaving poor Yashiro standing alone as reporters descended on him.

---

Hikaru did in fact go to the restroom-but it was a public restroom at the train station.

When he slipped into the women's room, Akari met him inside with a large bag. She looked at her watch. "If you're going to catch the train, we have ten minutes."

Hikaru was already stripped off his clothes. Akari handed him the outfit from her bag. "You know, I was saving this for a special occasion."

Hikaru managed a smile. "This is a special occasion. It's going to be a Go game that's going to go down in legend. I think I've seen it done often enough to put the hair extensions in. You start working on the make-up."

Wordlessly, Akari took out her make-up case. For Hikaru, she'd even brought out the eye shadow with glitter and sparkles.

Akari was aware of how stupid Hikaru's idea was. Too many reporters, too many cameras, too many people he knew-he was going to get caught. But if he was determined to go through with this no matter what, then all she could do was ensure that his face was as unrecognizable as she could manage to make it.

And that whatever people might say about Hikaru wearing a dress in public, they wouldn't be able to say that he didn't look *damn* good in it.

---

Kurata whispered to Akira, "So I followed you here. Why are we here?"

"Shh," Akira hissed, scanning the faces in the room, most of which were fixed on watching the Synthesized Artificial Intelligence beat yet another Japanese professional player.

Perhaps Akira had somehow managed to get here first. He'd lost sight of Hikaru pretty quickly, but he'd thought that he knew Hikaru's destination. No, there was really no doubt in Akira's head that Hikaru was coming here; it was a little scary how well he knew Hikaru at this

point. And because he knew Hikaru so well, Akira knew that he had to stop Hikaru before he did anything that he would regret for the rest of his life.

On the stage, Professor Wen was announcing another victory for SAI. Everyone watching had seen that coming for the last fifteen minutes; only the human player's stubbornness had drawn out the game.

Wen announced, "This will be our last match of the day. I hope you will all join me for a few refreshments."

Kurata whispered in Akira's ear, "What a scumbag. I've done some background research on that guy. He majored in computer science in college but failed, and every job he's got since then has been with his family's connections. Word on the internet is that no one in the Chinese programming geek community believes that he actually wrote that program himself. He must have brought it, and now he's basking in the fame. In the name of Go, I hope that computer isn't really Sai."

Akira continued searching. But he was stopped by his father's voice. "Akira, I'm glad to see you. Please come over."

Akira expected that his father would be asking why he wasn't at the ceremony. But perhaps he hadn't even thought of that; Koyo Touya had a look on his face that was saying "Save me." He had been cornered by Professor Wen.

"It's such a pity that you have a doctor's note excusing you from playing. Touya Meijin," Wen was saying. "I would be happy to open up one more match if you still want to play."

Akira understood why he'd been called over: it was to hold his father back if he tried to jump onto the stage and challenge for a game.

Akira cut in, "I think my father would rather play the real Sai. It's a pity he isn't here, but you won't accept online matches, will you?"

Wen's smile grew cold. "I don't need to. Anyone who wants to call himself Sai can challenge my SAI to a match. If my program beats that person as well, that that just means mine is the real Sai, doesn't it?"

"I object!"

The voice was hideously, horribly loud, enough so to cut through the conversation. Heads began to turn to the figure standing in the doorway, bent over and gasping from running.

"Wait, that's only weddings, isn't it? Let me try again. I'm here to play that fake computer, and I'm not leaving without a game. Allow me to introduce myself: I'm the *real* Sai."

Softly, under his breath, Akira said three very bad words that his mother would have been ashamed to hear from him.

She was wearing as simple purple dress with a long silk bow hanging down her chest, finished with tall black boots. A golden bracelet jangled on her left wrist, and around her neck was a golden necklace with a heart on a chain. Long black tresses fell in loose curls over her shoulders. She looked like she could have stepped off a page of a fashion magazine.

And needless to say, 'she' was Hikaru.

---

Author's note: Yeah, we had to get back to the cross-dressing at some point. Otherwise I would have to change the title of this fic, and I hate to think of new titles.

# Chapter 15

## **Hikaru's Life Lessons Number Ten: Friends Recognize You Even When You Have A Dress And Make-Up On; True Friends Are The Ones Who Are Willing To Admit That They Recognize You**

---

The silence in the room was cut by the sound of someone laughing. It was Professor Wen.

"Open matches are closed. If you want to try again, our next location will be in Thailand," he said dismissively.

Akira broke through the crowd and ran forward, grabbing Hikaru's arm. "We have to get you out of here. Come on," he hissed.

Hikaru shrugged off the arm with a sad smile. "I'm glad you still care, but I'm not leaving."

"You idiot, you're going to get caught-"

"I know. People here know me, and that's why they wouldn't believe I was Sai if I came as myself. But it only has to last long enough for me to finish the game. I know you think I'm selfish, and maybe usually I am, but I have to do this. You know why."

Akira let his hand slip away. Hikaru shouted again, "I'll play anyone here! If I beat every single one of you, will you let me play?"

Professor Wen made a gesture towards the security standing around to guard the computer.

Koyo Touya stepped in front of them. "One moment of your time, Professor. You said that you would be open to playing one more game if I would challenge. As you know, I am medically unable for

one more week-which is why I would like to offer this player as a substitute."

"For you? Why?" Wen asked.

"Perhaps I simply wish to acknowledge the determination of a younger player."

Wen considered.

It was the disguise that saved Hikaru. Akira watched Professor Wen give Hikaru the once-over, and dismiss him. A teenage girl couldn't possibly be any kind of threat.

"Very well. One more game. You can all keep eating. We'll call this the dinner entertainment."

Behind Akira, Kurata asked, "Does that girl look somewhat familiar? I feel like I've seen her before. Can't quite put my finger on it."

Akira looked down. His hands were shaking.

---

As Hikaru stepped on to the stage, Sai followed.

Sai was in the vogue. It was the same mode he'd been in when he'd played Touya Meijin. In over a thousand years of existence, it was a state of mind he'd reached at most eight times.

Despite what Sai had said before, deep down he was not ready to let someone else achieve the Hand of God ahead of himself, and certainly not a shiny box instead of a player he could respect.

*Bring it on, you metal monstrosity,* he thought silently.

*Let's find out who the real "SAI" is.*

---

The urge for Akira to jump on to the stage, pick Hikaru up, and bodily care him off was almost overwhelming. Truthfully, the only thing stopping Akira was that it was already too late. There were two media cameras aimed at that stage, and Touya Meijin's surprising endorsement had ensured the entire audience was watching as well.

The make-up was very well done. Most people present who'd met Hikaru still didn't recognize him. But reporters were taking pictures, and when Hikaru's girl-face ended up plastered in media outlets around the world, his identity would never be able to remain hidden under that kind of scrutiny. There were too many people who might potentially recognize him, and even if his friends kept quiet, one of those people would blow the whistle. And then Hikaru's private media-nightmare would begin, made worse by the fact that he'd have to explain the cross-dressing too.

Akira cursed Hikaru's perpetual delusion that putting on a dress made him unrecognizable. He was an idiot.

Except he wasn't an idiot. Akira knew that Hikaru had to realize that he was going to get caught. He was doing this for Sai.

Sure, Hikaru was selfish and reckless and when he decided to be oblivious you couldn't knock sense into him with a crowbar. But he was also generous enough to sacrifice his future for a friend and brave enough to stand before a crowd of famous Go figures from around the world and make an absolute fool of himself. Hikaru would never be anyone but Hikaru, under any circumstances, wearing any clothes.

And it was up to Akira to save him, as usual.

Akira moved rapidly through the crowd, shoving people aside with uncharacteristic rudeness, until he finally found the three faces he was looking for. Three people who were huddled together and talking in whispers, sneaking concerned glances at the figure on stage who they had clearly all recognized.

Akira said, "I know that all of you don't like me very much, but I need you to help me for Hikaru's sake."

Isumi said, "I don't dislike you. In fact, I need to apologize for some assumptions I made earlier about you forcing Hikaru to cross-dress, which you clearly haven't. *This* was definitely a patented Hikaru scheme."

Ochi said, "I kind of admire you, I'm just not very good at being nice to people I admire."

Waya said, "You might be annoying, Akira, but I've come to realize that Hikaru is far more annoying than you are-so since I'm still friends with him, I don't see why I can't be friends with you. What do you need us to do?"

---

Waya slid up to his long-time teacher, Morishita. "May I have a word with you, sir?"

Morishita let himself be pulled aside.

"Do you know who that is?" Waya asked.

"Of course I know who that is, he's been coming over to my house every week for a Go study session for almost four years. What is Hikaru thinking?"

"Shh! I need to let you in on a secret. It's about Sai. He's actually a convict. He joined the Yakuza at a young age and took the fall for a hit done by his boss' son, and he ended up with a lifetime sentence. But while he was in prison he began to devote all of his time to learning how to play Go. And-he's Hikaru's uncle."

"His uncle?"

"You can understand why Hikaru doesn't talk about it. But he couldn't resist a heartfelt plea from his uncle to let him play in this match."

Hikaru came here in disguise and is communicating with him with a hidden ear phone. We have to keep this a secret."

"Well, of course. Imagine if people found out Sai was a convict, it would be a serious blow to the Go world."

Waya breathed a sigh of relief and wondered how Akira Touya had known that his teacher was a passionate devotee of Yakuza movies.

---

Isumi said, "She was hospitalized at age ten, and she's never even seen the outside world since then. Her only possession after her parents abandoned her was a Go book."

Doi sniffed into his handkerchief. "That's so tragic!"

"Sai became friends with Hikaru when he was hospitalized for hitting his head in his grandfather's attic. He showed her how to play online. But her constitution is so weak that she can't go outside for fear of catching an illness."

"How is he playing for her?"

"There's a very small phone in his ear," Isumi explained.

Doi said, "That's the saddest story I've ever heard. Of course, we won't say anything."

Kosemura added, "Mysteries sell more papers anyway."

---

Ochi looked down at the piece of paper in his hands. Drawing on a lifetime of experience with the major figures of the Go world, Akira had given each of the three a list of names of people most likely to recognize Hikaru or people who had cameras, and what to say to them in order to shut them up. Ochi was the only one who had taken notes, but he couldn't help but be nervous about this. Charm was not his strong point.

"Oh, dear, they didn't tell you the full story about Sai, did they?" he asked the young female camera woman.

"Real story?"

"I guess the regular media wouldn't have heard, but everyone who plays Go knows that Sai was a ghost. A young woman was stabbed to death the night before she was supposed to take the professional test-and after that a strange player appeared on the internet. A player who couldn't be beaten."

The woman looked fascinated. Ochi continued, "But what they don't tell you is that she's been playing Go by possessing the bodies of young women. If you look directly into her eyes, you'll be the next victim. So be careful."

The woman nodded frantically, and adjusted her camera angle.

---

Akira said, "It's a split personality."

Kurata said, "I knew Hikaru couldn't play like that. And after seeing how hard he tries at all of his games, I can't believe he's been holding back."

Akira nodded. "But there are two Hikarus."

Kurata said, "So they both play Go, but one is a much stronger player. Like in Yugioh."

"No, not like in Yugioh!"

"Of course, it's a split personality not a ghost."

"Right..." Akira said.

Kurata asked, "So why do we have to keep this a secret? Why not tell the world?"

"Because the usual Hikaru is the dominant personality. If Hikaru was cured, Sai would disappear. And what a loss for the Go world that would be. It's tragic, but it's for the best if Hikaru never finds out about this. That's why you have to keep quiet."

"Mums the word," Kurata promised.

---

Waya tapped a man with a camera on the shoulder. "Excuse me?"

He turned around, camera in hand. "Yes?"

"Akira Touya says to delete any pictures you have of Sai's face or the entire world will know about the second bathroom incident. You can keep the rest of your shots, just not those."

The man paled and began deleting pictures.

---

Isumi whispered in another ear, "Akira Touya says you have been known to babble women's names before you pass out drunk at one of his father's parties. And that your film of this game should avoid Sai's face."

---

Ochi approached Kuwabara warily. The wily old title-holder gave him a predatory smile.

"Akira Touya says-it's for the good of the Go world."

"You can tell that brat I don't need him to tell me that. I know how to keep a secret."

---

Akira had saved the most difficult job for himself. He couldn't risk putting it off any longer-he approached Mr. Amano at the back of the room.

"So your story about Sai being a young girl will finally be vindicated in the press."

Mr. Amano smiled. "Nice try, Akira, but I can write an even better story. After I let you trick me, I went through pictures of all your friends' faces, but I couldn't remember what she looked like well enough to identify anyone. This time, I've had a very long look. And for starters, 'she' is a -"

Akira cut in, "Don't you think it's better for the Go world if we leave Sai as a mystery? All of this publicity has benefited both players and reporters. I bet your magazine has been getting more subscriptions. We want people to keep up the interest in Go-which could be hurt by a scandal."

Mr. Amano said, "In all honesty, you're right. But for me personally, a story like this could be quite profitable. So I have to take that into account as well."

Akira gritted his teeth. Sometimes you had to lay it all on the line for the one you loved.

"Do you remember that *Go Weekly* calendar of shirtless Go players you were trying to do that no one would agree to pose for?"

"Yes?"

"Would it still sell if I was the only one in it?"

Mr. Amano smirked. "Akira, it would sell like hotcakes if you were the only one in it."

---

The four young Go players met back by the drinks table. "How did it go?" Akira asked anxiously. Because it only took one person to crack a secret...

"Mission success," Waya reported. Ochi added his confirmation and Isumi gave a thumbs-up.

"How is the match going?"

"Do you think any of us had time to watch?" Ochi demanded.

A cheer went through the room. Someone next to Akira shouted, "She did it! It's the real Sai!"

Akira experienced his first ever group glomp. It wasn't as unpleasant as he might have thought.

Suddenly trying to worm free, Isumi said, "He's going to be mobbed by reporters! What about an escape route?"

Akira said, "Already taken care of."

---

Hikaru understood now why Sai had said that he didn't mind playing computers. Because that had been a truly beautiful game.

The final move had followed a pattern very similar to the Sai-Touya game, right down to the place Hikaru had identified after the last game.

Hikaru had felt Sai's smile behind him. "But did they really think I would play the same move? I can learn from my mistakes."

The computer had forced the game out to the end instead of resigning gracefully like Touya Meijin, but from that moment on it had been Sai's victory.

"Good game, Sai," Hikaru said.

He turned around, and there was nothing there. "Sai?"

Nothing except several people with cameras rushing the stage. Hikaru gulped.

Koyo Touya grabbed his arm and pulled him forward. Hikaru quickly followed, ducking through the side exit.

Koyo Touya planted himself in the door. "I won't let anyone come through this way, so you should have a good head start, Hikaru. I demand that you and my son explain everything to me later."

"Y-y-you know it's me?" Hikaru asked.

"I shouldn't recognize you?" Koyo gave Hikaru a closer look. "Why are you wearing a dress?"

"You mean to say that you didn't notice until now?" Hikaru gave Touya Meijin a deep look of respect. "Sir, you're crazier than I am!"

Then he hightailed it out of there. Good thing Akari had never managed to persuade him to try high-heels.

---

While a few curious people were searching the closest train station for Sai, Akira knew better. He went straight to the station closest to the Hokuto Cup, because that was where Hikaru would have left his clothes.

He was just going there to see if Hikaru needed any help, Akira told himself. He might need someone to smuggle the bag of woman's clothes for him. And even if Akira was helping him just this once, this completely didn't mean they were together again or anything. (Maybe, maybe if Hikaru did some serious groveling.)

Akira prepared the speech he was going to make in his head. It went something like this: so I saved your butt again, maybe mostly out of habit at this point, but I'd be lying if I said this doesn't mean that I don't care a bit, so if you care a bit then we both care and there's no point pretending we don't, not that I was doing that, but basically if you want to say you're sorry this time I'm listening.

Hikaru sat on top of a toilet seat, shoulders hunched over. He had changed back into jeans and a T-shirt, and his wig was rammed into his backpack. When he looked up, two bright blue streaks of mascara ran down his cheeks.

In a hoarse voice, he said, "Akira, Sai disappeared. He just kept getting more transparent, and then he started popping in and out of existence, and each time might be the last one he reappears, and I'm not sure if he's coming back this time-I don't know what to do!"

Akira's words dried up in his throat. When Hikaru stumbled towards him, he opened his arms and wrapped them around him.

# Chapter 16

## Epilogue:

---

"I thought that last time you'd disappeared for good, Sai."

"Nonsense, Hikaru. Luckily for me there were no pregnant women present. But just remaining visible is very hard these days."

"Akira and I are official again. He even finally told his parents about us. They both already knew, and then he wanted to tell my parents and I had to tell him that they both already knew and I'd just been keeping it from him because he's so anxious about that sort of thing, and then he was so angry that I think he almost dumped me again."

"I had confidence that you would resolve your problems. I really believe that you two were meant to be."

"It's really thanks to you that he even started speaking to me again, Sai. And as soon as I thought he looked like he was softening, I pulled out my secret weapon. It worked! Let me tell you about it..."

---

### *Flashback:*

Hikaru held up a packet of papers in his hand. "Tickets. For the Mt. Fuji tour and for Fuji-Q-Highland. They let me trade in the tickets that I couldn't use for getting these half-price, and they're expiring at the end of this week, so it's now or never. If you have any interest in going."

"Fuji-Q is that amusement park, right?"

Hikaru looked sheepish. "I got them, that day we were supposed to go together. You were going to have to go to the amusement park

with me another time in order to make up for standing me up-I didn't know why you couldn't make it at the time!"

"I thought you could barely afford one ticket."

"No manga and anime and net cafés for a while."

Akira said, "But if you got these the day we were going to go, then you didn't even know I had a reason for not showing. You were mad at me, weren't you? You sent me a text that day saying no future dates unless I called you in the next ten minutes! You went ahead brought the tickets after that?"

Hikaru looked sheepish. "I know that text was mean. Sai told me so. When I said you had to call me in the next ten minutes, what sort of I meant to say was that I was worried about you. So? Tickets expiring? Unless you're free this Saturday?"

Hikaru had his clueless-but-cute look that Akira was never sure if he did on purpose. Surrender was inevitable. "Fine. You can be my boyfriend again."

"Wait, we *stopped* dating? When?" Hikaru asked.\*

He was lucky Akira found dumb to be endearing.

---

\*In Hikaru's defense, it was not that he had forgotten Akira telling him that they were breaking up. It was just that Akira often made drastic threats when angry, such as "Hikaru, if you facilitate my father breaking one more of my laptops, then I will kill you in a slow and painful manner," yet despite the death of two more computers and an i-phone, Hikaru remained alive. Therefore he had simply assumed that breaking up was another extreme threat that would never be carried through. They were having a fight, sure, but they were still together. This assumption was supported by the fact that he was still living part-time at Akira's house and Akira was still talking

to him every day, even if it was only to be snarky. Can you blame Hikaru for being confused?

---

As they walked back together, Hikaru said, "I'm still a selfish jerk, just so you know."

Akira said, "And I'm told that I'm uptight and obsessed with Go. I think we both have known each other long enough to know what we're getting in to."

Hikaru said hopefully, "And back when you were dumping me, I thought you said something about wanting to take our relationship to the next level? Because I've been waiting to hear that for a while now."

Akira miss-stepped. "What do you mean you've been waiting? I was waiting for you to say something!"

"I was being gentlemanly."

"Like hell. You are many things, but a gentleman isn't one of them."

"I also might possibly have been waiting until I could beat you at Go. Because I kind of assumed we would be playing for who would be on top, and I wanted to wait until I had an even chance at it."

Akira glared. Someone would definitely not be winning their *first* game, that was for sure.

---

*Present:*

"Akira's father and some of my friends know about you now. So does Ogata-I hope you don't mind?"

"Of course I don't mind, Hikaru. But you told Ogata? I can hardly believe you would do that."

"Well, as it turns out, Ogata really isn't that bad."

---

*Flashback:*

Ogata cornered Hikaru and Akira at the train station. "I thought that if you weren't at the station closest to the game, you would be here. Left something behind, Shindo?"

Akira froze. He had confidence that he knew every major Go professional in Japan well enough to guess what lies they would find most compelling-but he knew Ogata well enough to know that he wasn't easily lied to.

Ogata said, "Shindo is clearly not Sai and you will not convince me otherwise. Now care to tell me the truth?"

Hikaru said, "It's okay, Akira. We can tell him."

Akira's mouth hung open. Hikaru couldn't blame him for his shock, given the feelings he had expressed to Ogata in the past. But Ogata had saved Sai's afterlife, at the cost of being arrested, and Hikaru owed him a debt as a result.

After listening to the explanation, Ogata nodded as if it was the only possible reason that could have made sense. He bowed in Hikaru's general direction. "It is a pleasure to meet you, Sai-sensei. At the first available opportunity, I would like to play a game for you so that I can see you as well. In fact, any time that Shindo is too busy, I would be happy to play for you."

"He's not even here right now," Hikaru informed him, snickering.

---

*Present:*

"So I had to promise him that I'd let you meet him later, and that you'd play another game with him, etc. I hope you don't mind, I

thought you'd be up to a game with Ogata once in a while."

"Did he really say that he would play a game for me anytime I wanted? What a nice man. Do you think he'd mind if I went over whenever you're busy?" Sai asked hopefully.

Hikaru went back to hating Ogata.\*

Akira poked his head in, "Can I come in?"

"My room is your room."

"There's an interesting news story playing on the TV downstairs. It turns out that the computer SAI was really the same program as Deep Orange, the experimental AI from China that has been playing games online. Someone named Yang Hai was really happy about getting his computer program back. And he wants to challenge you to another game, Sai. Can you believe the nerve?"

Sai said, "I have no problems at all with playing anyone who faces me openly and honestly."

Akira spotted the calendar on Hikaru's wall. "Is that another one? Hikaru, how many did you buy?"

Hikaru looked at his fingers. "Um... four."

Akira growled, "Given that the only reason I posed for the *Go Weekly* calendar was to save your worthless hide, I think it's a little tactless of you to buy four copies."

Hikaru said, "But I need four! One is for my bedroom, one is for school, one is for carrying around and showing off to people, and one is in a sealed plastic bag in the family safe."\*\*

Akira rolled his eyes. "I should have held out for royalties on those damn calendars."

Hikaru said, "You should have. It's been only two days and they're already doing a reprint."

Akira said, "I actually would have rather not known that."

"Sai, tell Akira about how we were meant to be so he won't dump me again."

Akira threw a pillow at Hikaru, who threw it at Sai, who could not participate.

"I didn't get a chance to tell you when you appeared, because Hikaru was screaming too loudly, but I'm glad you're still here, Sai," Akira said. "If there's anything that I can do to help you, just let me know."

"I appreciate the offer, Akira, although I don't think I will end up taking you up on it."

Little did Sai know how wrong he was.

---

\*Amount of time that Hikaru spent not hating Ogata: Twenty two hours, fifteen minutes, and two seconds.

\*\*Hikaru was lying. In reality, there were twelve calendars. One he'd gotten just so he could cut it into little pieces and fold his favorite picture into his wallet for good luck (Akira looked incredibly hot in March), five he'd gifted to relatives and friends at school so he could brag, and two were in sealed plastic bags in a bank (one was for in case his house burned down and one was for in case the calendars became collectible and Hikaru needed a spare to sell.) He would have brought more calendars if they hadn't run out of copies, but he was first in line for the second printing.

---

*Two weeks later:*

Bursting in the room, Hikaru demanded, "Akira, I need a baby!"

Akira gaped in shock. "You want children?" He tried to picture Hikaru molding an impressionable child in his image. The mind boggled.

Hikaru shook his head impatiently. "No, I don't want a baby, I need a baby! That bastard Ogata is talking about how he never thought of himself as a family man but it might be time to settle down, and he started showing Sai pictures of Go sets that were child-safe! He's trying to get the jump on me! He's going to steal Sai!"

Akira sighed wearily, "Hikaru, we talked about this. Ogata is not conspiring against you."

Hikaru frowned, clearly unconvinced. "It's all down to race with time. Sai's grip on the Earth is slowly deteriorating. And he thinks that if he's going to be stuck learning Go all over again, he had better get an early start and pick out a nice family with the right background."

"And what's so wrong with Ogata?"

Hikaru looked at him as if he was insane. "Everything! I might have come to realize that I just want Sai to be happy, but there are limits to how much I'm willing to accept! I swore on *Gone With the Wind* and everything."

As usual, Hikaru had completely lost Akira. By now he had learned to just roll with the flow. "What do you want me to do about this?"

"Well, I've already asked everyone else I know if they might be happening to have a baby they could give me, and it didn't work well."

"Does this have something to do with that red mark on your cheek?"

Hikaru scowled. "I don't know what sets Akari off, I really don't."

"I think I do."

"But it was Isumi's right hook that really surprised me!"

Akira composed a few apologies in his head. He'd started handling that sort of thing for Hikaru.

The person in question continued, "It seems the only people we can count on our ourselves, Akira. You must have a few female relatives who can make babies."

"Hikaru, I'm not going to get myself slapped as many times as you have when the result will still be the same."

"I've got it! Akira, you have to persuade your parents to have another child!"

"What? My parents? Why MY parents?"

"Because mine aren't famous Go players. The closest relative who plays Go is my grandfather and I think he's too old. Come on, Akira! Do it for me! If your mom and dad go senile from old age then we'll raise the baby together."

"That's my parents you're talking about and they aren't senile-raise together!?"

"Oh, this is my best idea yet!"

And with that, Akira knew the plan was doomed to failure. It was a relief, really. He was too old to have a sibling. But the odds of his parents deciding to adopt triplets were probably still better than one of Hikaru's "ideas" generating anything but another round of apologies.

---

Eleven months later, Sai Touya was born into the world.

---

*The End*

---

*Omake:*

Hikaru and Ogata sat on the floor, both crouched on their hands so their faces were almost level with the infant.

"Hikaru. Hi-ka-ru," Hikaru proclaimed.

"O-ga-ta. It's easier to say," Ogata countered.

"Hic-u?"

Yes!" Hikaru cheered.

Ogata pushed up his glasses. "That sounded more like he said 'hiccup.'"

Sai clapped his hands together. "A-ki-ra!"

Both parties turned a death glare on Akira, who swallowed nervously. "He is *my* little brother..." he said weakly.

---

"Who's your favorite, Sai?"

Hikaru held up a signed copy of Yugioh Zexal Volume one. Ogata held up a baby rattle.

"Unca Ogata!" Sai shrieked, toddling over to Ogata.

"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo," Hikaru wailed.

Akira said, "He's two years old, Hikaru, what did you expect? Give the book to him in a few more years. And please stop telling everyone that Ogata is a pedophile. People might actually start to believe you."

---

"Aw, do you like the shiny? Does it remind you of a Go stone? Yes it does!" Hikaru cooed, bending over the stroller.

Sai reached up and yanked Hikaru's pearl earring.

"Ow!"

Akira said, "It's your own fault for teasing him with it."

"I thought I was out of reach. Wagh!" Hikaru stumbled over a rock and almost fell.

"You've been tripping over those high heels all day. Don't wear them if you don't know how to walk in them."

"What? I'm doing you a favor! You don't want to dress up as the mother, so that's why I have to."

Akira sighed. "Unlike you, I have no desire to be mistaken for Sai's parents to begin with."

"Don't you think it's hilarious when people ask us how long we've been married?"

"Not really, no."

"How long have we been married?"

"One year or eight years, depending on whether you count from when you proposed that we elope to the Netherlands for that legally invalid ceremony or when I first knew I was stuck with you for life."

"Now, if your father will just go senile then we can adopt Sai."

"My father isn't going to go senile, Hikaru."

"I can hope, can't I?"